



PS4 | XBOX ONE | WII U | PC | 3DS | PS VITA | ANDROID | IOS

GAMES MASTER

Hoverboard

Self Balancing Scooter

UK STORE - **UK 3 PIN PLUG** - 12 MONTH WARRANTY



**ALL
TERRAIN**



AVAILABLE IN
6 COLOURS

funstock.co.uk

THE UK'S NO.1 MULTIFORMAT GAMES MAG

GAMES MASTER

Issue 301 / March 2016

“This is perhaps the most instantly iconic gaming series”

A

long time ago, on a carpet far, far away... ok so it was back in 1999 that the Danish bricks and the interstellar fifty films first collided in toy form, going on to inspire perhaps the most instantly iconic gaming series in history. TT is about to return to the saga that ensured the Lego games lifted off to such acclaim, so we naturally tagged along for the ride, popping into the studio to get a sneaky first glimpse at Lego Star Wars: The Force Awakens.

Elsewhere we've pretty much let Pokémon take over. The hallowed critter collect-a-thon is a rocking 20 years old this month, so we've fired a special feature-shaped party popper off in its direction.

Regular readers will also notice we've had a retool of our Game Guide section. In its new form we reckon it'll be more useful than ever as you look to bag the best games, regardless of where you're playing them!

Enjoy your GM!



Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman - Editor



GET MORE FROM YOUR GM!



Online at www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster



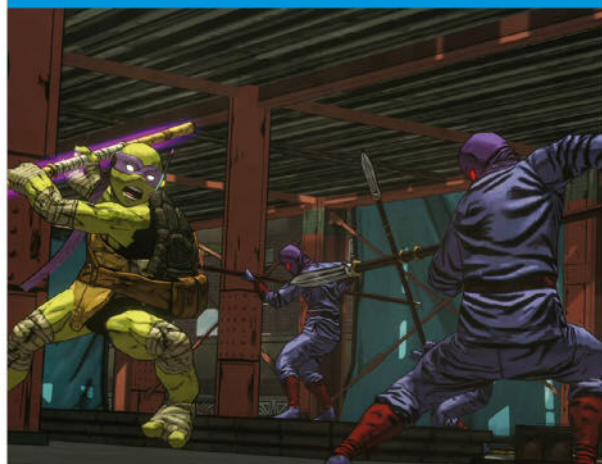
...or subscribe. See p92 for details.

WIN!

One of three 2DS
Pokémon bundles!
Head on over to
p88!

EDITOR'S CHOICE

MY TOP PICKS THIS ISSUE



10

A first look at a potentially dream-fulfilling combo. Turtles + Platinum Games = legitimate palpitations.



20

20 years on, we don running shoes and take a nostalgia-laced jog down Pokémon memory lane.



64

Woah there, Commander. XCOM 2 just became our first page-bursting high scorer of the year!

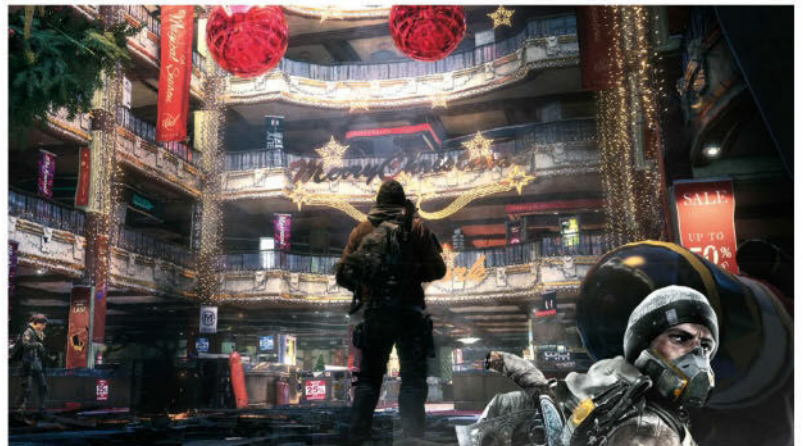
Contents

What's In Your Latest Issue?



COVER STORY

Only the best games are featured on GM's cover!



28 THE DIVISION

Ubisoft's persistent world of last minute betrayals and treacherous loot theft is almost upon us. Join us for one last paranoid preview.

64 XCOM 2

We're taking the fight to the aliens in this strategy sequel - but is fighting a desperate losing battle against an oppressive extraterrestrial government regime as fun as it sounds? Find out in our review...



46 LEGO STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

We've been behind the scenes, gossiped with the writers, and quizzed the devs - all to bring you exclusive insight on this sci-fi blockbuster. Make a BB-line for it now!

GM Previews

32 HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION

Time to take back America one explosive remote-controlled car at a time.

34 HITMAN

Now that Agent 47's officially gone episodic, we check in to see how he's handling the transition.

36 TORMENT: TIDES OF NUMENERA

Classic RPG Planescape: Torment finally gets the successor it deserves.

37 HYPER LIGHT DRIFTER

Legend Of Zelda meets Dark Souls in a neon-lit, electronica-soaked wilderness? Sign us up.

38 PARAGON

Epic Games chucks the MOBA and the third-person shooter into a blender and whips up a unique smoothie.

GM Reviews

68 LEGO MARVEL'S AVENGERS

Six Marvel movies reimagined in bricks - on paper that's a hell of a package, but does it all slot together?

71 OXENFREE

Creepy teen horror with plenty of intriguing chat, and a crazy twist: its cast still cares about radio.

72 BRAVELY SECOND: END LAYER

Another portable RPG from Square Enix, bravely going further than Bravely Default bravely went before.

76 FIREWATCH

Hold on, two radio-heavy, mystery-driven natter-a-thons in one issue? Something fishy's going on here.

79 DARKEST DUNGEON

A maddening voyage into a world of Lovecraftian horror and futility. A bit like a trip to the Post Office.

GM Regulars

06 FANBASE

We've got the best fans around, and that's why we give you three pages to let us know what's on your mind.

10 UPFRONT

We celebrate 20 years of pet-on-pet punch-ups with an in-depth look at the making of the original Pokémon games.

58 INDIEMASTER

This month, we sit down for a chat with an evil artificial intelligence. No, not Robin, it's Event [0].

84 RETROMASTER

We return to Raccoon City for a look back at Resident Evil 2, the game that left us with a phobia of raccoons.

88 CULTUREMASTER

You've probably seen a lot of Pokémon in your time, but have you ever seen them on... glass?

Team GM

Meet The Magazine's Makers!



Future plc, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA
Tel 01225 442244 **Fax** 01225 732275 **Email** gamesmaster@futurenet.com
Web www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster

EDITORIAL

Editor Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman
Production Editor Robin Valentine
Art Editor Sam Freeman

CONTRIBUTORS

Louise Blain, Ben Griffin, Leigh Loveday, Daniella Lucas, David Meikleham, James Nouch, Phil Savage, Jen Simpkins, Tom Stone, Alex Summersby, Chris Thursten, Justin Towell, Ben Tyrer, Ben Wilson

ADVERTISING

Commercial Sales Director Clare Dove
Advertising Director Andrew Church
Advertising Manager Michael Pyatt
Account Manager Steven Pyatt
 For advertising enquiries please contact Andrew Church
 andrew.church@futurenet.com

MARKETING

Group Marketing Manager Laura Driffield
Marketing Manager Kristianne Stanton

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

Production Controller Fran Twentymann
Production Manager Mark Constance
Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future
Distributed by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue,
 London EC1A 9PT, Tel: 0207 429 4000
Overseas distribution by Seymour International

CIRCULATION

Trade Marketing Manager Juliette Winyard - 07551 150 984

SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK reader order line & enquiries 0844 848 2852
Overseas reader order line & enquiries +44 (0)1604 251045
Online enquiries www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk
Email gamesmaster@myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

LICENSING

Senior Licensing and Syndicate Manager
 Matt Ellis (matt.ellis@futurenet.com)
 +44 (0)1225 442244 Fax +44 (0)1225 732275

MANAGEMENT

Editorial Director Matthew Pierce
Group Art Director Rodney Dive
Deputy Group Art Director Mark Wynne

FUTURE PUBLISHING

MD, Magazines Joe McEvoy
Chief Financial Officer Penny Ladkin-Brand
UK CEO Zillah Byng-Thorne

Next issue on sale 24 March 2016

Future is an award-winning international media group and leading digital business. We reach more than 49 million international consumers a month and create world-class content and advertising solutions for passionate consumers online, on tablet & smartphone and in print.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).
 www.futureplc.com

Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial officer Richard Haley

Tel +44 (0)207 042 4000 (London)
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244 (Bath)

© Future Publishing Limited 2016. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used or reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. The registered office of Future Publishing Limited is at Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA. All information contained in this magazine is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. Readers are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this magazine. If you submit unsolicited material to us, you automatically grant Future a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in all editions of the magazine, including licensed editions worldwide and in any physical or digital format throughout the world. Any material you submit is sent at your risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents or subcontractors shall be liable for loss or damage.

Future Games: The First Choice For Gamers. This magazine is brought to you by Future Publishing Ltd, the makers of Edge, PC Gamer, Official Xbox Magazine and Official PlayStation Magazine.



THE MOST DEDICATED TEAM IN THE BUSINESS

Well used to playing the part of a tiny unit thrown against impossible odds, Team GM adapted easily to life as XCOM soldiers. Well, until they all got melted by plasma blasts, that is.



Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman

"If you were a Pokémon, which one would you be?" was the philosophical conundrum of the hour in GM Towers this ish. Given his panicked expression on deadline day, there was no other choice than Psyduck for our esteemed editor.



Sam Freeman

Asked the same question he'd probably pick Alakazam and make some quip about working magic on the pages of GM each issue, but we all know the reality. Art Ed Sam is most definitely Pileswine - basically a walking beard with tusks.



Robin Valentine

Our reader-proclaimed 'explosively handsome' prod ed says he's a dead ringer for Snubbull. "Many women like to frolic with it because of its affectionate ways," reads one Pokémon bio. Yeah...not so sure about that one, Robin.

The BIG GAME finder



Quantum Break

Preview - P42



Assetto Corsa

Preview - P44



Unravel

Review - P70



Resident Evil Zero

HD Remaster

Review - P74



Pony Island

Review - P75



Assassin's Creed

Chronicles: India

Review - P78

FANBASE

The best of your emails, tweets, and carrier pigeon death threats

If you've got a gaming-ready PC or laptop, there's plenty of digital price-slashing to be found from distributors like Steam and Origin.

CONTACT US

Email gamesmaster@futurenet.com

Twitter www.twitter.com/gamesmaster

Facebook www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster

Web www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster

Post GamesMaster, Future, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1AU, UK

The waiting game

What's the most excited you've ever been for a videogame coming out?

GTA V - the trailers looked unreal, the world bigger, the punchlines funnier, and the characters more broken than ever. Rockstar has never failed to impress.

Courtney Evans, Facebook

Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 - the hype behind that game was enormous and everyone was talking about it! It felt like a pop-culture event!

Rob Manifold, Facebook

The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time - as a kid I remember wanting to buy every magazine that said anything about it! The adverts on TV were amazing. Best Christmas present ever.

Stanley Cohen, Facebook

Team GM's Robin remembers being absolutely obsessed with evolution sim/ creature creator Spore in the long run-up to release, following the mind-blowing first reveal video. Shame the final product couldn't quite live up to all of the hype... ■

Space man

Well Christmas day has come and gone now, and brilliantly I got two new games. Imagine my excitement and delight having The Witcher 3 and Bloodborne, two games I really wanted to play, and loading up each one in turn - only to get the dreaded message: "Your PS4 hard drive is too full, you need free up space in order to play this game". I was left with only one choice: to start frantically saving my data to the cloud storage and making back-up saves on my PS4, and then making the hard choice of deleting my beloved games data. First went The



BUG OF THE MONTH



Fallout 4's wandering merchant Carla and her Brahmin sure do get around - even onto the roof of someone's house, in this screen from Frank Castle.

Got a screenshot of a bug you've run in to? Send it in!

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Jamie asks, why are digital games still so expensive?

My reason for writing to you is regarding the price of digital download games. I shall try to keep this civilised, but the issue really irks me. Browsing through the online stores on the major consoles, I find that games are far too often ludicrously expensive.

Star Wars Battlefront and WWE 2K16, for example, are over 50 quid each. I understand the cost of video game production, marketing, and such, but when they sell games digitally, they save money on packaging, disks, and distribution. They also have lower risk in the sense of not having to produce a lot of stock that may not sell. Surely this

saving should be passed on to the paying consumer? I'd consider buying all my games as downloads if it was cheaper than physical copies.

Now, I have a deep love of Nintendo, but they are also at fault. Charging 40 quid for a digital 3DS game Amazon will send you for 30!

Can you have a word with these people to make them see sense? We want to pay less when we, as consumers, get less for our money.

Jamie Garbutt, email

The unfortunate truth is that there may not be any savings to pass on. The price of packaging is miniscule compared to the overall development cost - and the servers you download digital versions from still have to be paid for.

If a bigger publisher did make digital versions cheaper, it'd also risk being shunned by high street retailers, who don't want to be undercut by online stores. Sad, but true. ■



While they can seem expensive, overall videogames are cheaper than they've ever been.

WIN!

Got an opinion? Have even the barest grasp of words and how to put them together? The best letter bags a free mystery game!

*Don't forget to include your postal address and chosen format!





READER'S TOP 5 | SPORTS GAMES

Martin runs down his list of the best ball-punters and board-riders around



1 Sensible Soccer

"An all time classic that is still addictive to this day. Proof you don't need HD graphics to make a great game."



2 FIFA 09

"The FIFA that took the crown back from Konami, with new modes that brought players together."



3 Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3

"Improves everything that was already great about THPS2, and has the best soundtrack too!"



4 Tony Hawk's Underground

"The story mode mixed in with some great physics makes for one of the best Hawks games."



5 SSX Tricky

"This has it all. Great voice cast, awesome soundtrack, and cool tricks mixed in with brilliant gameplay."

Martin Dootson, Facebook

Disagree? Why not head over to our Facebook page and let us know what your top five would be! ■



"SONY PUTTING ONLY 500GBS OF SPACE IN THE PS4 IS A JOKE"

Uncharted Collection, then GTAV. What, 2.7GBs still needed?! So the rest had to go - Outlast, Resident Evil Remake, and Resident Evil: Revelations all gone.

I love my PS4 but what an absolute pain the in backside it is to have to delete games to play new stuff. Sony putting only 500GBs of memory space into it is a joke - I get there's the cloud for saves, but why can't that be expanded to include your actual game data as well? I really don't want to be faffing about with having to get a bigger hard drive, but it looks like I will have no choice if I want to actually play all the games I own.

Martyn Jamieson, email

Hard drive space can be a really frustrating issue these days, with games seemingly getting bigger all the time, and more and more only available by digital download. One of the newest versions of the PS4 does come with a 1TB hard drive - but that's no use for early adopters like yourself. We suspect this issue is one of the reasons Sony has brought out PlayStation Now - it's testing the waters for current-gen game streaming, working towards a future where

you won't need any data stored on your machine at all.

Combo selector

What's the best fighting game ever?

Street Fighter II started everything, and it's still in competitive play to this day.

Hadoshrooms, @hadoshrooms

Ultimate Marvel vs Capcom 3, because it's so fast paced, you really have to put in the effort to be able to show off your fighting skills.

Joe Wall, Facebook

Fighters Destiny, because you didn't just need the energy bar to win, it used judo rules. Plus you could play as a cow that drank its own milk...

Bradley Fish, Facebook

Can Street Fighter V beat these all-time classics? Find out in our review in issue 302 next month... ■



YOUR TOP 5

MOST WANTED

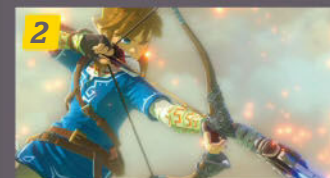
It's all change this month as From's rock-hard RPG storms the charts, and Link makes a heroic return...



1 DARK SOULS III

Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** 12 April

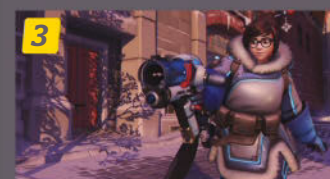
Looks like you lot are almost as excited for this as editor Matt, who even now is building a bonfire in the office.



2 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Format Wii U **ETA** Winter

The magic of one of Nintendo's best series, combined with a full open world? It's got to be a winning combo.



3 OVERWATCH

Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** Summer

No one does it quite like Blizzard, and this superheroic multiplayer shooter looks ready to steal our hearts.



4 THE DIVISION

Format PS4, XO, PC **ETA** 8 March

You're never ones to turn down a good end of the world, are you? Fair enough - this plagued New York looks ace.



5 THE LAST GUARDIAN

Format PS4 **ETA** Winter

As good as Shadow Of The Colossus' giant bosses were, they just weren't cuddly. Enter bird-cat-dog Trico!



OFF THE CHART!

The hot topics you've been gabbing about

- 40%** The craziest things that happened last year
- 21%** Behind the scenes of games development
- 16%** What you want out of a Splatoon sequel
- 13%** Features the NX should have
- 10%** Game worlds you'd love to live in



Nick Littlefield has made the perfect Pokémon-playing machine with this hand-painted Game Boy. Find more of his work at: <http://bit.ly/gmnick>



Keep a squid on hand at all times with this Splatoon keyring, made by Etsy seller ArlandAtelier - grab one here: <http://bit.ly/gmsquid>



Reddit user mycataccount crocheted this slice of retro gaming magic for their boyfriend. Lucky guy!



TOP TATTOO!

GM fan Luke Riley wears his Skyrim love proudly with this amazing sleeve tattoo, featuring Alduin and Talos.



Prepare for an adventure with these real-life health and mana potions, available to buy from Etsy seller WhimsicalbyNature1 here: <http://bit.ly/gmpotions>

SOCIAL GROUSING

Wisdom and weirdness from our bustling social media channels



I'd like a behind-the-scenes of Superman 64, so we can see who is responsible for such an evil game.

Daniel Climo, Facebook



Would love to see The Warriors game remade.

Craig Glasscock, @craig_14



I swear as a kid GamesMaster used to be quite 'edgy'...

James TalksGames, @JamesTalksGames

MANIAC OF THE MONTH!



A Fur Fighters remake would be awesome! That game is huge, with tons of stuff to unlock. Dino World was humongous!

Karl Lymer, Facebook



After I killed some enemies in Fallout 4, only their heads were left behind, just floating there in mid air. Kinda creepy...

Anthony John Harris, Facebook



As a Steam user, prices have never been so good. I remember when videogames used to be like \$80 on PC, when floppies were a thing!

B.A., @AlanDHudson

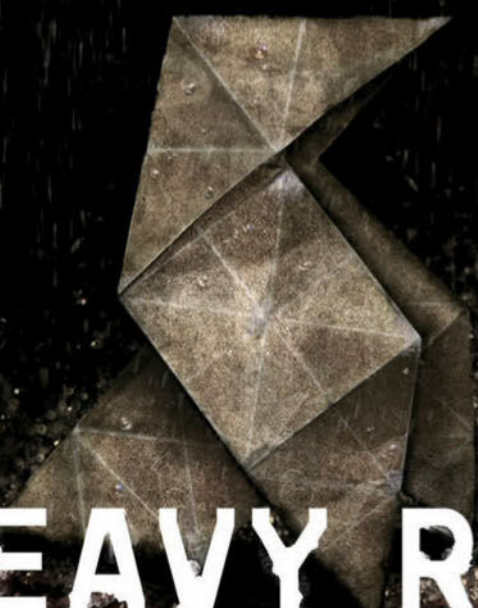


I'd like to live in the world of FIFA 16, where the England team can win matches. I wouldn't like to live in the world of Goat Simulator, because... well, obvious reasons.

Braden Burgess, Facebook



PS4 and PlayStation are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Also, "PS4" is a trademark of the same company. Heavy Rain & Beyond Two Souls Collection ©2009-2016 Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Published by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Developed by Quantic Dream. "Heavy Rain" is a trademark of Quantic Dream. "Beyond Two Souls" is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. All rights reserved. Prices and information are correct at time of going to print. Prices exclude delivery. Free Super Saver delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available on eligible orders. Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details. Amazon, the Amazon logo and Amazon.co.uk are registered trademarks of Amazon EU S.A. or its affiliates.



HEAVY RAIN

C O L L E C T I O N

BEYOND

T W O S O U L S™

PRE-ORDER NOW
4TH MARCH
£29.99

amazon.co.uk





We've sneakily snatched some shots from the new Assassin's Creed film - see them here!

TURTLE POWER!

Platinum Games announces **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutants In Manhattan**



SHELL'S KITCHEN

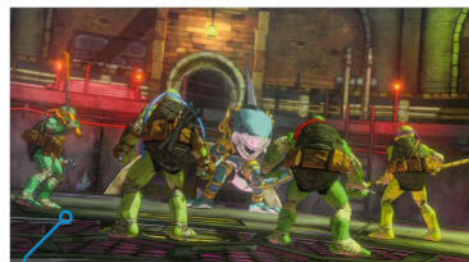
A handy mug book of the various villains you'll batter across the streets of Manhattan



Bebop and Rocksteady were once human criminal gang members, but were transformed into mutants.



This looks to us like a Rock Soldier, a warrior with stone skin drawn from General Krang's Dimension X army.



This salty customer could be either Bludgeon or Armaggon, both mutant sharks from the comics.

14 On target



For this month's Take Aims, we've got FIFA Ultimate Team and The Division firmly in our sights.

16 Chart attack



What are the top ten games you want on Nintendo's next console? The results are in!

17 Water palaver



Ratchet & Clank creator Insomniac unveils its new game - a submarine metroidvania.

All four of the turtles are playable, of course. Why you'd select anyone other than Raphael is a mystery to us, though.



P

latinum Games - the acclaimed developer of Bayonetta, Vanquish, and Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance - has confirmed that it's hard at work on a co-op action game based on everybody's favourite sewer dwellers: the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. This cel-shaded brawler will let players step into their half-shell shoes to battle familiar foes such as Shredder, the Foot Clan, Bebop, and Rocksteady. A full single player campaign is promised, alongside four-player online co-op.

Whichever turtle you plump for, you'll find that each has a distinctive play style, with a moveset designed to reflect their personality and preferred weaponry. So, the dual katana wielded by Leonardo will feel appreciably different from Donnie's bo staff, while the hot-headed Raphael will control differently from laid-back dudebro Mikey. Each turtle can be customised yet further with ninjutsu moves, equippable combat items, and bonuses.

And while it's true that the testudinal quartet has a less than stellar record when it comes to videogame adaptations (1991's Turtles In Time

the loveable kids cartoon. So, while old enemies such as Shredder and the Foot Clan return, they're rendered in a rather darker style.

Bebop meanwhile, has swapped his visor for a pair of dayglo shuttershades, and he menaces the turtles with a roaring chainsaw. Hulking rhinoceros Rocksteady appears in military fatigues, with a sledgehammer in hand and a machine gun strapped to his back. Fan favourites such as Splinter, April, and Krang are all also set to make an appearance in a narrative that sees the gang pitted against all manner of robotic, extraterrestrial, and mutant adversaries.

The Burning Question

What other classic cartoon would make a great videogame?



Cubix

It could be an MMO where you get to create your own robots.
Finlay Cunniffe, Facebook



He-Man

In the style of Arkham City, with She-Ra as an added on level.
Harry Oosh Montague, Facebook

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.

"WHILE OLD ENEMIES SUCH AS SHREDDER RETURN, THEY'RE RENDERED IN A DARKER STYLE"

notwithstanding), Platinum's pedigree in the action genre leaves us feeling optimistic. Based on what's been shown so far, the combat appears pacy and kinetic - a blur of amphibian action. Special 'team combos' will allow two or more turtles to perform a powerful move together, often with screen-clearing consequences, although it's currently unclear whether multiplayer will be online only.

Pizza party

The campaign follows an original storyline penned by TMNT comics writer Tom Waltz, and the game looks set to take its cues from IDW's current run of action-packed strips rather than

But, exciting as all that sounds, it's worth noting that this announcement arrives at a busy time for Platinum - perhaps one of the busiest in its history. Right now, the studio is working with Nintendo to finish up Star Fox Zero, while simultaneously developing RPG sequel Nier: Automata. The developer recently admitted that it would have to delay Xbox One-exclusive, Scalebound, into 2017, citing the project's scale as a reason for the postponement.

Nevertheless, Platinum has confidently announced a Summer 2016 release date for Mutants In Manhattan, when turtle power will touch down on PC, PS4, and Xbox One, as well as PS3 and 360. Cowabunga. ■



THE FASS AND THE FURIOUS

Switch on your Eagle Vision for the first shots from the **Assassin's Creed** movie

1

"I think we've done something original in this genre," Fassbender told the Wall Street Journal after finishing shooting last month. "I think we've got something special." Well, he would say that.

2

Costume director Sammy Sheldon Differ says the team used the 15th century time period's "strong influences of Moorish deco to give the Assassin's looks a nomadic warrior personification". Now that's killer fashion.

3

There's no sign of Aguilar's hidden blade here, so the production is clearly keeping his version under wraps until later in the year. He's still got all his fingers, which rules out it being a copy of Altair's model, at least.

4

What's that on the sword handle? Yep, the red emblem of the Templars. A tease of the other weapons to feature in the movie includes a sword with the head of a Templar Grand Master engraved on it. We detect a theme...

5

The production has been shooting across Spain, Malta and even London's venerable Pinewood Studios, where the production wrapped last month. Leaked set images from Malta even included a game-style 'viewpoint'.



THE BIG PICTURE THE BIG PICTURE THE BIG PICTURE
GM
THE BIG PICTURE
 THE HOTTEST SHOT OF THE GAMING MONTH!
 THE BIG PICTURE THE BIG PICTURE THE BIG PICTURE

5

The Burning Question

What videogame would you love to see a movie of?



Final Fantasy X

Just imagine Blitzball on the big screen!

Mitch Mitchelson,
 @bedbug182



Metal Gear Solid

Just get the right director, and a perfect actor as Snake, and it will be awesome.

Jacob Barnes, @Jbarnes532

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.



21st century Assassin-to-be Callum Lynch is an outsider, Fassbender says, institutionalised from his early teens.

"FASSBENDER IS ALSO ON PRODUCER DUTIES - THIS IS NO MERE VIDEOGAME CASH-IN"

Ok, ok, videogame films don't have a particularly good rep - let's try not to even think about Lara Croft

Tomb Raider: The Cradle Of Life or, gulp, DOA: Dead Or Alive - but the Assassin's Creed movie might just be the answer to your desperate prayers. What does it take for a successful gaming adaptation, you ask? Well, Michael Fassbender in a hood might be a good start.

Breaking away from the traditional pattern of directly adapting an existing game in the series (because that went so well in the first-person section of Doom), the Assassin's Creed movie introduces us to a brand new pair of genetic ancestors. X-Men and Prometheus star Michael Fassbender has his work cut out for him as he takes on the role of both 21st century descendant Callum Lynch and Assassin Aguilar, who is battling Templars in 15th century Spain.

Refreshingly, all the action takes place in the same universe as current Creed adventures, but these new characters immediately remove any sense of expectancy. The fact that Ubisoft's own film studio is responsible

for production also means our beloved brotherhood is in safe hands. No need for any *sync-ing feelings*. Plus, a tease from AC head of content Azaiza Aymar says we might see some "familiar faces." Ezio Auditore was stealthing around Italy in the 15th century, so a cameo might just be in order.

Creed only

The director is Aussie Justin Kurzel, who previously worked with Fassbender and fellow Assassin's star Marion Cotillard on last year's adaptation of Macbeth. Thankfully he's no Michael Bay or Uwe Boll - he has a rep as an excellent director, and the support of Fassbender and the Oscar-nominated Cotillard is bonus star power. Add in that Fassbender is also on producer duties and it's clear this is no mere videogame cash-in.

Additional cast members include Jeremy Irons as villainous Abstergo head Alan Rikkin and Spanish actress Ariane Labed as an Assassin aiding Aguilar in his quest. Plot details are suitably hazy but we know that Callum Lynch will encounter Abstergo in the 21st century and learn the ways of the Assassins through a brand new style of Animus. We'll get to fully synchronise on 26 December, when the movie sneaks into cinemas. ■



“Each new iteration seems to be moving further from its core”

FIFA 17 Ultimate Team will need to recapture the thrill of team building, or it'll lose Ben Tyrer forever

Not sure if I want to admit this in print but... £709.75. That's how much I spent on Ultimate Team booster packs between 2011 and 2013. EA's behemoth of a mode is essentially Pokémon cards – just swap Charmander for Ross Barkley – but even more addictive. Unfortunately (unless you're my wallet) recent years have seen the series blaze its efforts over the crossbar.

Let's take the latest introduction to the series: Draft Mode. It is, in theory, a

Good Idea. Instead of getting frustrated over unattainable players – the likes of Messi, Aguero, Ronaldo etc – we're given access to certain virtual footballers through a lottery. A selection of random players pop up, you choose the preferred ones, and have a temporary team for a tournament. It adds a tense risk vs reward structure to matches, and is also a clever way of dissuading people

from buying coins from black market sellers outside of the game.

Yet it goes against what I love about Ultimate Team: the gradual progress and trading; the fist-pumping euphoria of pulling a special card; accumulating coins, players, and, eventually, the squad of your dreams. Draft Mode is a fleeting experience. To make matters worse, disconnect while playing it, even in an offline tournament, and you're

“THE GRADUAL PROGRESS AND TRADING; THE EUPHORIA OF PULLING A SPECIAL CARD”

automatically counted as losing, flushing the entry fee down the bog.

Team titans

Of course, no one is making me play Draft Mode, so there's also more of a personal reason I'm losing my love for Ultimate Team. I just can't escape the feeling there's a natural peak for every player. My motivation to go back wanes because my favourite teams – a toss up between 13's Bundesliga all-stars and 14's Premiership powerhouses – took me a lot of time and, yup, money to put together. Watching them disappear sparks a realisation, a voice saying “Mate, this isn't worth the hassle”. The only thing I have to show for all that effort is a tab on the web app, where I can look at old cards in the

Generations Squad Builder. Basically, that voice is sticking around longer every year. I'd love to pretend that in recent years I've grown up, became sensible with money and left my addiction in the past. But really, all EA needs to do is put the focus back on squad building. I want the rush of finally having enough coins to grab the player I've been drooling over, rather than getting tasters with loan players. Each new iteration seems to be moving further from its core and focusing on making sure people are spending money. If they find the balance again, I'll be ready to jump back in. For the sake of my bank account, I hope that doesn't happen. ■

STATS MAGIC The gaming month in facts and figures

100

Cost, in pounds, of the Doom collector's edition, which includes a spiffy 12 inch Revenant statue. Out 13 May.

1/3

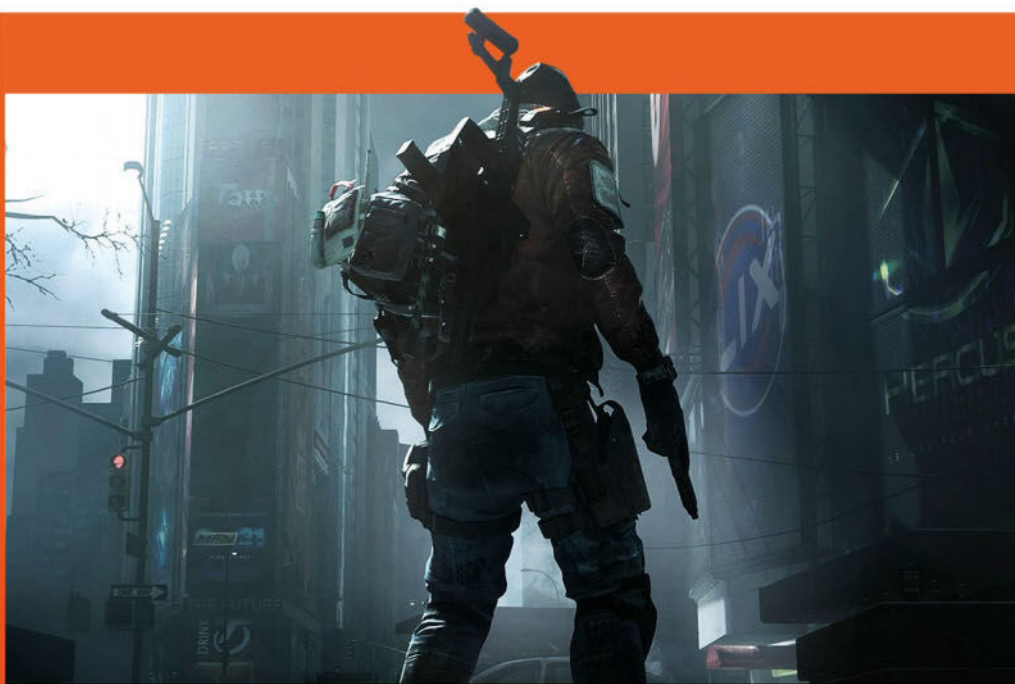
The proportion of Wii U owners that have purchased Splatoon. That's more than four million copies!

5,000,000

Gross revenue, in dollars, that The Witness generated in its first week on sale – more than Braid took in a year. According to creator Jonathan Blow, this “will allow us to make more nice games in the future” – but for now he's focusing on post-launch support for his puzzle epic.

10

Years since Bayonetta developer Platinum Games was founded. Happy Birthday, guys!



“Publishers have sold us on always online. Can they meet expectations?”

With *The Division* almost here, James Nouch argues that publishers need to tread carefully when they embark on persistent, evolving games

Gamers are a pretty nostalgic bunch really. We may lust after virtual reality headsets and graphical whizz-bangery, but we're also prone to imagining the past as a hallowed golden age of gaming – a halcyon era before our medium's artistic purity was tainted by grasping money-men.

Right now, it seems as though a lot of gamers pine for the days when publishers just brought their games to market and left them the heck alone. No day one patches, no microtransaction stores, and certainly no season passes. Back then, it seemed, we were simply presented with a developer's vision for what the game should be. £40. Take it or leave it.

But as budgets soared and second-hand sales skyrocketed, publishers were forced to ponder ways

to stop the rot. If a player is never done playing your game, they reasoned, they'll never trade it in – hence the increased importance of all things multiplayer, the rise of the DLC expansion pack, and the industry's ongoing love affair with XP progression across every genre. These are all means of managing 'player retention'.

The logical endpoint for this line of thinking is the likes of *Destiny* – connected games that are explicitly sold on the basis that they offer constantly evolving experiences and huge scope for player progression. Ubisoft is on the cusp of launching its own take on this formula: *The Division*.

Addition by division

But the publisher would do well to take note of the various issues that Bungie and Activision have run into in their attempts to retain players indefinitely. Because while the notion of holding onto players for long periods may sound peachy on paper, it's a

demanding arrangement that requires a tremendous amount of careful design, content creation, and community management. The problem that Bungie and Activision now face is that they are struggling to meet the demands of an arrangement that they've instigated with players.

In a recent press release for *The Division*, Ubi explained that, “as an online, open-world RPG, the game is designed to provide a max-level experience and keep players entertained after the main story arc is completed. The development team has a complete post-launch plan to keep the experience fresh for all players”. That sounds confident, but Ubisoft had better bear in mind that this is a Faustian pact it's entering into – an arrangement with tremendous potential financial benefits, but also a terrible burden in the form of meeting player expectations.

Publishers created this world, and they've finally sold players on the benefits of persistent, always online gameplay with ongoing DLC schedules. Now, they just have to meet the expectations they've fostered in their audience, or else they may end up nostalgic for a time before players expected their games to last forever. ■

“THE PROBLEM BUNGIE NOW FACES IS IT'S STRUGGLING TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF PLAYERS”

GM MOST WANTED

What's most tickling the team's fancy this month



MATT'S PICK

The Division



In recent weeks I've found myself floating around in a kind of content-less no man's land in *Destiny*. This latest slice of Clancy looks to scratch that MMO shooter itch, while also tapping into

the tactical veins of the likes of *Ghost Recon*. Those two things right there? The stuff online multiplayer dreams are made of, I reckon.

PS4, XO, PC – 8 March

ROBIN'S PICK

Thumper



Describing itself as 'rhythm violence', this game looks like an absolute assault on the senses, and I couldn't be more into it. The visuals simultaneously look strikingly beautiful and like something out of a fever-induced nightmare, and even just in trailer form it already seems brilliantly tactile and weighty. It's great to see such a unique take on the genre – is this the first game ever to star a 'space beetle'?

PS4, PC – Summer

SAM'S PICK

LEGO STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS



The announcement of the next *Star Wars* game from Lego – how could you not be excited? But what makes this really cool isn't just the usual comedy moments and playful characters that you'd expect, but the addition of an explanation of events that happened between *Return Of The Jedi* and *The Force Awakens*.

PS4, XO, Wii U, PC, PS3, 360, PS Vita, 3DS – 28 June

THE NX BIG THING

Our readers (that's you!) pick their most wanted games for Nintendo's next console

The good folk over at Nintendo HQ are famously capable when it comes to keeping all of their sauciest cards close to their collective chest. Despite us knowing the new NX console is on the way, that it's likely to receive a full reveal, and possibly even launch by the end of the year, speculation is still rife as to what we'll actually be playing on it. It's a good job we've got such passionate, opinionated, and thought-splurging reader types picking up the mag each month. We've picked your brains to discover which games Ninty really needs to have on it's books for NX. ■



18%

F-ZERO

Despite a lull in speedy racer types in recent times, the long-absent anti-gravity speedster makes it as joint top of your list.



18%

MARIO

So many different ideas came in from you lot starring everyone's favourite plumber. The most popular? Super Mario Galaxy 3.



12%

METROID

As we predicted after our hands-on with Federation Force, the 3DS spin off isn't satiating fans' thirst for a full blown outing for Samus.



9%

MARIO KART

Nintendo would have to break out all the stops for a new entry in this series. How do you improve on the perfection of Mario Kart 8?



6%

DIDDY KONG RACING

Er, how did this make it in? Has ex-GM art ed and monkey-karting fanatic Evil Phil rigged the polls?



6%

SOMETHING TOTALLY NEW

Perhaps Nintendo has been relying on its storied franchises for too long - is it time to get more original?



AND 6% BAYONETTA
THE 6% THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
REST... 3% POKÉMON
3% SONIC ADVENTURE
3% OTHERS

SOCIAL BLURBS



Nintendo needs something to bring us back. Metroid or a true Mario game, something to aim at mature gamers again.

Richard Shutt



I want to see something I haven't seen yet with characters that are new. Something with some proper in-house Ninty polish.

Wil Overton



The Wii U is a class system. Am I the only one who's disappointed Nintendo is killing it prematurely to make way for the NX?

Robert Bentley



Why not a GamesMaster game? Dominic Diamond can do the voice over, with Sir Patrick Moore floating in the background...

Stevie Madz



The Eirnin can tether smaller objects, allowing you to pick up a sunken mine and use it to blast your way past some weather-worn stonework.



The disappearance of Merryn's father remains a mystery for now, but we do know he was an underwater explorer too.



At certain points in her adventure, Merryn will have to leave the safety of her sub to swim through areas.

A WHALE OF A TIME

A new aquatic adventure that's looking reel good

Insomniac Games, the developer responsible for the likes of *Sunset Overdrive* and the *Ratchet & Clank* series, has unveiled a sumptuous marine metroidvania for PS4, PC, and Xbox One. *Song Of The Deep* casts players as Merryn, a spunky submariner on a search for her missing father, and tasks you with exploring a two-dimensional world filled with equal-parts aquatic algae, ancient ruins, and adventure.

And while the depths may be beautiful, they're a dangerous place for a young girl in a ramshackle sub. The SS Eirnin is a rickety homemade creation, you see, so maintaining a vigilant watch for deep sea

beasties and environmental hazards is essential. You might be able to dodge unsightly anglerfish and shimmering jellies as you explore abandoned seabed cities, but worse things lurk in the deepest, darkest corners of the ocean – titanic arachnids spinning watery webs in Stygian gloom, and longfanged leviathans waiting patiently for unwary morsels to drift by.

An unfamiliar plaice

Fortunately, your craft is a nippy little thing, and Merryn's an assiduous so-and-so, capable of repairing and upgrading her jury-rigged sub as you progress through the gear-gated deeps. And if all else fails, the sub's front-mounted guns can make marine mincemeat out of smaller nasties that swim her way.

Merryn herself speaks with a fine Irish brogue, and her deep sea odyssey seems to draw on Celtic folklore in its depiction of seabed civilisation. The merrow, for instance, are musical maidens who lived below the waves of the Irish coast in years gone by, and Merryn can be seen exploring their crumbling cities in some of the screenshots revealed so far. Whether the legendary critters make an appearance themselves remains to be seen, but we haven't long to wait before finding out for ourselves. *Song Of The Deep* casts off in Summer. ■

“TITANIC ARACHNIDS SPINNING WATERY WEBS, AND LONGFANGED LEVIATHANS WAITING PATIENTLY”

The Burning Question

What's the best ever water level in videogames?

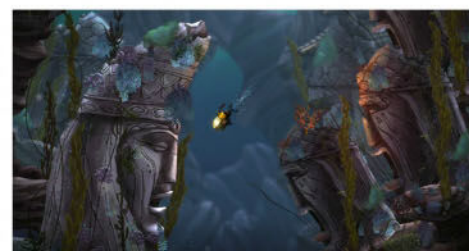
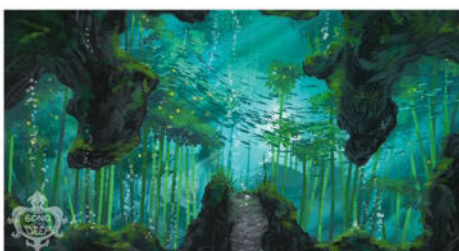


Hydrocity
From *Sonic 3* – for that amazing soundtrack!
Darren Timmouth,
Facebook



They're all bad
It's just degrees of hate, from boiling hot custard to soggy socks in winter.
Bleep Bloop,
@orginarymagoo

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.





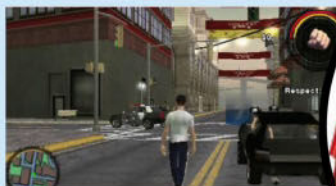
WE'RE ALL AGOG

PC gaming distribution service GOG has launched an early access platform with a difference: the Games In Development program enables customers to obtain a refund on any game for any reason within 14 days of purchase. Furthermore, players will be able to roll back to previous versions of a game at any time, enabling you to disable an update if it breaks the game or simply makes unwanted changes.



STORY TIME

One of GM's favourite games of 2015 is getting a sequel, according to Her Story developer Sam Barlow. The understated and enigmatic original casts you as an investigator trawling through FMV clips in an effort to piece together a mystery, and Barlow claims his sequel will once again employ onscreen actors - but to tell an entirely new tale.



ROW HOME

Usually, when a game is cancelled it's unceremoniously dumped in an unmarked digital grave, but Volition has broken with convention to make the prototype of its cancelled PSP game, Saints Row Undercover, available online free of charge. An aborted attempt to make a portable sequel to Saints Row 2, it's glitchy but completely playable.



FUN AND GAMES

As part of a new range of toys intended to feature "more empowering and imaginative roles", Mattel has revealed a games developer Barbie doll. Each year, the toy manufacturer selects a 'career of the year' for its flagship product; currently, Barbie's toiling away as a film director. The doll will be available in Summer - presumably once she's finished crunching on her latest project.

Topping the leaderboard this issue

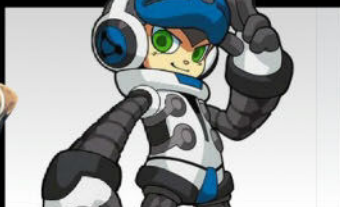
WIN
LOSE

No, we don't want to continue thanks



THE MISTAKEN KING

Bungie's president Harold Ryan has parted ways with the company following a period of intense upset within the Destiny community. It comes alongside a highly unpopular set of matchmaking changes, which have since been rolled back, and the news that Destiny 2 has been delayed.



SLIGHTLY LATE NO. 9

Kelji Inafune's Mighty No. 9 has been delayed yet again, slipping from a scheduled release date of February to sometime in Spring. In an update on the game's Kickstarter page, Inafune explained that the delay was necessitated by bugs discovered in the game's matchmaking, before going on to apologise personally: "We have no excuses for disappointing our fans and especially our backers once more."



SHOCK HORROR

Five Nights At Freddy's developer Scott Cawthon has removed his latest game from sale following complaints that the title was missing key features. "I got too eager to show the things that were finished," explained Cawthon, "that I neglected to pay attention to the things that weren't." Those who purchased role-playing spinoff Five Nights At Freddy's World are being refunded, and Cawthon has made the game free to all.



LET'S PLAYSTATION

Sony has attempted - and seemingly failed - to file a trademark for the term 'let's play'. The McArthur Law Firm described Sony's actions as an attempt "to monopolize the term" and petitioned the US Patents and Trademarks Office to reject the application. Meanwhile, EA has tried to trademark the word 'ghost' - an action that Ghost Recon publisher Ubisoft has unsurprisingly spoken out against...



29/02

LEAP INTO ACTION

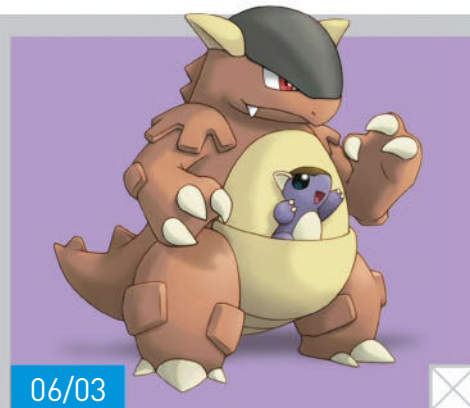
A leap day is like the Gregorian calendar's gift to gamers: 24 free hours to pump into Fallout.



04/03

NOT THAT TWILIGHT

Perhaps the most underrated Zelda ever, Twilight Princess returns in HD form today.



06/03

YO, MOMMA

It's Mothering Sunday, so why not treat yer dear ole mam to a spot of couch co-op?



08/03

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Destiny lost its thrill for you? Try Ubisoft's take on stats and shooting, The Division, out now.



THE **GM** TO DO LIST

Crucial dates for your gaming diary. If you only do one thing this month, eat, but otherwise make a note of these events...



11/03

THE NEXT EPISODE

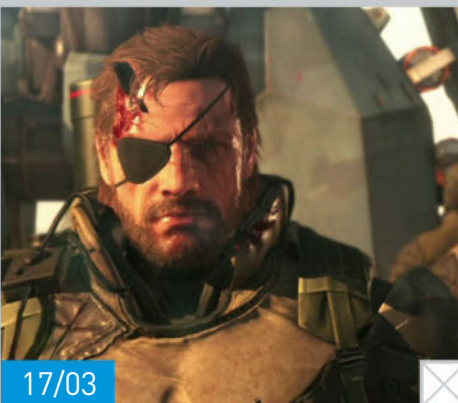
Agent 47 has gone all episodic for his latest excursion, and the first part's out today.



14/03

SAN FRAN CLAN

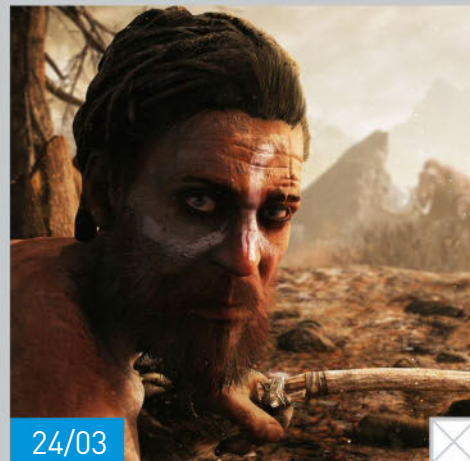
The Game Developers Conference kicks off in San Francisco, with a barrage of gaming news.



17/03

ST PATRICK'S, WHEY!

Celebrate a snake-free Ireland by firing up Metal Gear Solid and that Nokia 3210 game.



24/03

PRIMAL THEME

We hand down our verdict on Far Cry Primal and more in GM302, on shelves now!

INCOMING

Six big releases headed to a format near you...



01

Quantum Break
Format XO
ETA 5 April



02

Dark Souls III
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 12 April



03

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End
Format PS4
ETA 26 April



04

Total War: Warhammer
Format: PC
ETA 28 April



05

Mirror's Edge Catalyst
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 26 May



06

Deus Ex: Mankind Divided
Format PS4, XO, PC
ETA 23 August

MAK MON

We talk to Pokémon producer
story on the creation of

Some 20 years on from its Japanese launch, Nintendo's creature-catching franchise is so enormous that it has a certain sense of inevitability about it. But when Satoshi Tajiri founded Game Freak

in 1989, the only hint of the phenomenon to come were his rose-tinted recollections of a childhood spent bug-collecting in the Japanese countryside. These memories famously formed the basis of the pocket monster phenomenon, but back then, Game Freak was just an upstart developer with an urge to develop for the newly-released Game Boy hardware.

Once Tajiri's nostalgia crystallized into the Pokémon concept, production was anything but plain sailing. Then-composer and programmer, now-producer and company director Junichi Masuda was part of a team that would be considered miniscule by today's standards, piecing together a project of considerable complexity to fit the memory constraints of a teeny cartridge. Indeed, by the time of its Japanese launch in February 1996, Pokémon Red and Green (as they were known in the region) were several years late. Instead of developing a game for newly-released hardware, Game Freak launched Pokémon at a time when the Game Boy's popularity seemed to be fading fast.

"Development of the first generation of Pokémon games, Pokémon Red and Pokémon Green, took all of six years," explains Masuda when we ask about the

ING A STER

Junichi Masuda for the inside
a cultural phenomenon

development of those early instalments. "We worked meticulously on creating these titles with a strong conviction in what we believed would be interesting and enjoyable. For this reason, a lot of time was necessary." And once the games made it to market, the news wasn't immediately positive.

Word of Meowth

Because while many remember Pokémon as an overnight success story, its Japanese release was actually a little underwhelming. Although the game flirted with the lower reaches of the top ten at launch, it was a disappointing debut for a franchise that Nintendo had high hopes for. "In Japan, Pokémon Red and Pokémon Green sold in quite an unusual way. These titles were by no means a big hit from day one. In fact, the increase of their popularity was quite gradual and steady," Masuda recalls. "Back in those days, before the internet and social media, a game's popularity owed a lot to word of mouth. It was primary school kids who really popularised the game."

Mew, the mysterious 151st Pokémon, was key to generating this schoolyard buzz. Originally, this diminutive psychic-type was only included on the cartridge as part of a prank contrived by Game Freak designer Shigeki Morimoto. The mischievous programmer noticed a paltry 300 bytes of unused storage on the finished cartridge and slipped Mew in at the very last moment to fill the space, believing that the elusive creature wouldn't be visible to players. But an

GM Feature

On The Cover!

WE CAN DIGLET

The past and present series spin-offs that we never expected



POKÉMON SNAP 2000 - N64

A photographic excursion into Pokémon habitats that rewards compositional artistry (and apple-throwing) with high-scores.



POKÉMON TRADING CARD GAME 2000 - GAME BOY

Hudson Soft's attempt at a digital recreation of the playground craze, bashed into the shape of an RPG.



HEY YOU, PIKACHU! 2000 - N64

Though sadly never available in Europe, this Pikachu-raising game used voice-recognition technology to let players talk to the yellow critter.



Charizard is one of the series most iconic characters, and these days boasts two Mega Evolutions.



unanticipated bug led to Mew appearing in some players' games, creating a sort of playground urban legend that fuelled fevered discussion of the game and its mysteries.

All this secretive scuttlebutt took some time to ferment, however, and it wasn't until a full 18 months after the game's original launch that Pokémon reached the peak of Japan's weekly game sales charts. An updated version of the original games, Pokémon Blue, was released, first as a special edition only available by mail order, and later as a retail release. This ultramarine cart would eventually go on to form the basis of the international release of

Pokémon that achieved such popularity, acclaim, and success here in the west.

Because it's easy to forget, now, that Pokémon arrived in surprisingly fully-formed condition, executing its concept brilliantly on the first attempt. We ask Masuda how Nintendo and Game Freak were able to get so much right on the first pass, and he answers with characteristic modesty. "You are very kind to say that we had got so much right from the very beginning - thank you! All other factors put aside, the nine production team members were truly committed to their work - they were

incredibly meticulous. They were a truly excellent production team," Masuda enthuses.

A dedicated team isn't the only explanation for Pokémon's excellence, however, and the game's tardy release eventually proved a boon. "Over the course of the six years required for the development of the first generation of titles, the usable memory of the Gameboy console had increased, allowing us to include all of the first 151 Pokémon."

And it's that expansive and adorable roster of monsters, rather than the turn-based combat, role-playing systems, or idyllic settings, that he credits as the reason for the franchise's enduring appeal. "I think a lot of the success lays in the Pokémon themselves and the bond that fans create between themselves and the creatures they discover whilst playing. Fans love choosing and battling their favourite Pokémon. With each new generation there are new Pokémon for people to discover and enjoy."

Raichu are

But that original cast of 151 iconic creations almost never made it over to us at all. There were fears within Nintendo that the cutesy designs of the first generation of Pokémon wouldn't appeal to a western audience with a taste for brutal shooters and gritty machismo. A folder of designs for 'westernised' musclebound monsters was even produced at one point, but fortunately, then-president of Nintendo Hiroshi Yamauchi vetoed the decision, and the cast of loveable critters survived the localisation process unharmed.



THE EEVEE-LUTION OF 'MON

From sprite fights to 3D dust-ups, Pokémon's come a long way over the years...

GENERATION 1 1999 - GAME BOY

Red and Blue hit Europe in 1999, winning over the west with their trademark blend of collectability, strategy, and exploration.



GENERATION 2 2001 - GAME BOY COLOR

Gold and Silver introduced breeding, berry cultivation, and a day/night cycle that influences Pokémon location and appearance probability.



POKÉMON DASH 2005 - DS

This super simple DS launch title saw you frantically stroking the touchscreen to push your Pikachu around a racetrack.



LEARN WITH POKÉMON: TYPING ADVENTURE 2012 - DS

A DS typing instructional that shipped with its own bluetooth keyboard peripheral.



POKÉMON GO 2016 - MOBILE

You'll be able to catch Pokémon by wandering around actual tall grass in this GPS-equipped mobile outing, coming later this year.



The original Japanese box art for Pokémon Red and Green, as well as the remastered Pokémon blue that served as the basis for all international releases.

Another Nintendo president, the late Satoru Iwata, was also critical to the franchise's appearance on the world stage. Acting in his capacity as head of HAL Laboratories, Iwata was asked to analyse Pokémon's source code and decide upon the best way to localise the game for foreign markets. But in a spectacular feat of reverse-engineering, Iwata also managed to plunder the game's battle logic from the idiosyncratic source code, an achievement which



formed the foundation of Pokémon Stadium's 3D bouts. The entire process took Iwata a week, and he managed it without a single sheaf of documentation to guide him.

Magmar and pa

Now that 20 years have passed since the first 151 Pokémon entered the world, there's an entirely new generation of players out there who've gotta catch 'em all. We ask Masuda how the company goes about appealing to wizened fans and fresh-faced series newcomers at once. "Today you will see '90s kids who played the first Pokémon games, who are now parents playing with their children," he explains. "But some of the core gameplay elements simply appeal as much now as they did in 1996. The collectable elements of the game still appeal to people's sense of achievement, and it's great for strategic thinking."

"You have to make accurate judgements about what to change and what not to change. It is also about not making things too difficult. After two or three generations, games have a tendency to become more difficult. In recent titles, catching Pokémon by throwing PokéBalls is explained in-game, but we also make a point of trying to get into the heads of children who have picked up a Pokémon game for the very first time in order to better understand how the games feel to a first-time audience."

But where next for the venerable series? It finally made the transition from 2D sprites to full 3D models in 2013's

Pokémon X and Y, as well as introducing new features such as Mega Evolutions, Fairy-type Pokémon, and sky battles. And while news regarding the next main series entry is thin on the ground at the moment, there is a particularly interesting diversion on the horizon.

"Amongst other things, this year will see the launch of Pokémon Go - a groundbreaking mobile game that will encourage fans to search far and wide in the real world to discover Pokémon. Players will be able to catch, trade, and battle in the real world by utilizing location information," Masuda explains.

"I have been involved personally in the project. It is a game where players can search, trade and battle Pokémon in the real world. I think Pokémon Go will bring about a new kind of experience, different from that of existing Pokémon titles, allowing players to explore their own neighborhoods, searching for Pokémon together with their friends. It is in this way that we hope that Pokémon Go, which will be released in 2016, will provide new enjoyment to our fans."

Whether this free-to-play GPS-enabled excursion pleases or perplexes Poké-fans, it's clear that the legacy of the first generation of games remains remarkably strong after all this time. Masuda and his team accomplished a tremendous amount across six years of work on a 512kb cartridge. We query whether he had any inclination, during this long development period, of the phenomenon the game would become.

"20 years ago we could never have predicted that Pokémon would be such a success," he replies. "I am very happy that it has continued for 20 years." ■

GENERATION 3 2003 - GBA

Ruby and Sapphire made use of the GBA hardware to introduce double battles, weather effects, and a significant graphical upgrade.



GENERATION 4 2007 - DS

Diamond and Pearl allowed players to trade and battle online for the first time, while the DS touchscreen served as a natty simulated smartwatch.



GENERATION 5 2011 - DS

Black and White introduced cheerful animated attacks, a seasonal cycle, triple battles, rotation battles, and, er, Pokémon musicals.



GENERATION 6 2013 - 3DS

X and Y heralded the series' transition to fully 3D graphics, the arrival of fairy type Pokémon, and the introduction of Mega Evolutions.



GM Feature

On The Cover!

20 YEARS OF POKÉMON

Charting the two decades-long journey of a true videogame phenomenon

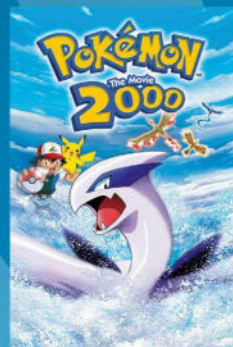
IN THE BEGINNING

After six years in development, Red and Green finally launch in Japan. The response is... tepid. These Game Boy originals achieve respectable, if unremarkable, chart positions at launch, but it's not until months later that word of mouth generates wider interest in the fledgling franchise. Part of this is down to schoolyard buzz, which takes some time to ferment, but they're also helped along by CoroCoro Comic, a popular monthly manga aimed at primary school kids. CoroCoro runs articles on the games alongside its regular strips, boosting their profile over several months.



POKÉMON PEDOMETRY

1998 saw the first generation of Pokémon games arrive Stateside, where American youngsters immediately fell in love with Pikachu and co. And although the phenomenon was still in its early years, that didn't stop Nintendo and Game Freak from applying its valuable new brand to all manner of crazy ideas. Consider the Pocket Pikachu a case in point. This lurid pedometer not only counted your steps, but also featured a little animated Pikachu on its monochrome display. But this particular Pikachu was a moody sort, and if you didn't interact with the device correctly, he'd take against you entirely and become unresponsive. The device eventually made it to Europe in 2000 as the Pokémon Pikachu Color, albeit with a less grumpy electric mouse.



FORAYS IN FILM

After six months of spectacular sales across Europe, and with the animated series proving a huge hit worldwide, Nintendo launches Pokémon Yellow alongside a limited-edition Game Boy Color. This rejigged version of Blue and Red mirrors the plot of the anime by placing Pikachu front and centre.

In the same month, Pokémon: The First Movie launches in Europe, and proves an enormous hit. This millennial year also sees the launch of Pokémon: The Movie 2000, Pokémon Stadium, and Pokémon Snap – what a year for Poké-fans.



1996

1997

1998

1999

2000

ENTER KETCHUM

By April of 1997, Red and Green have been out in Japan for over a year, and Pokémon is well on its way to becoming an industry craze. It's arguably the launch of the anime, however, that ensures Nintendo's latest property goes on to become a cultural phenomenon. The series follows Ash Ketchum on his quest to catch 'em all, and also makes a star out of Pikachu, who remains the de-facto mascot of all things Pokémon to the present day. Such is the show's enduring popularity that it continues to be broadcast throughout the world in 2016, with over 900 episodes aired in total.



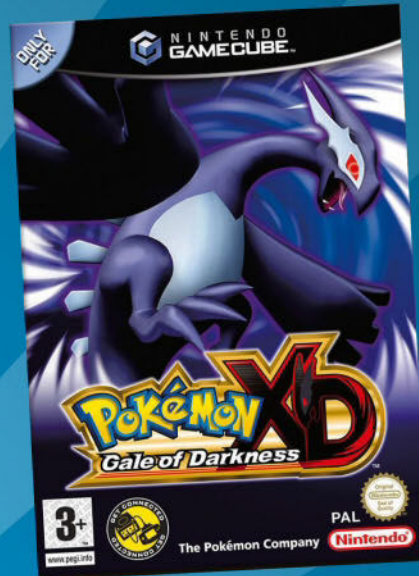
POKÉMANIA

Although European gamers have to wait more than two years before the phenomenon pitches up on our shores, it arrives with a heck of a bang. October sees not only the launch of Red and Blue, but also the UK premiere of the anime. Both come to dominate the attention of youngsters nationwide almost immediately. The following month sees the launch of the Trading Card Game which would soon take playgrounds by storm, as well as the debut of Super Smash Bros., which features Pikachu and Jigglypuff as playable characters.



CONSOLE MIGRATION

In July of 2003, Nintendo releases Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire in Europe, marking the franchise's first leap onto Game Boy Advance and the third generation of Pokémon proper. The additional power on offer enables the designers to give the game's visuals a significant update, as well as introducing double battles and the Hoenn region. In November of the same year, Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire comes along, offering surprisingly strong ball-paddling mechanics alongside all those familiar furry Poké-faces.



RUN FOR YOUR MONEY

March 2005 marks the release of Nintendo's dual-screen handheld, the DS, and the platform holder even has a Pokémon game to launch alongside its new hardware. Unfortunately, it's Pokémon Dash, a racing game in which you steer Pikachu around a topdown racetrack with flicks of the stylus. European players have to wait until October rolls around for another headline series release, with the launch of Pokémon Emerald for the GBA. This updated version of Ruby and Sapphire features a number of second generation Pokémon that weren't present in the original games, as well as the Battle Frontier - a post-credits trial for the toughest of trainers. Less than a month later, a sequel to Colosseum - Pokémon XD: Gale Of Darkness - hits the GameCube, bringing another slice of 3D battling to Nintendo's home console.



2001

THE GOLD RUSH

April 2001 is when European Poké-fans receive their first proper sequel in the form of Pokémon Gold and Silver for Game Boy Color. As well as introducing the Johto region and 100 new species, these follow-ups are also the first time we see dark- and steel-types. A sequel to Pokémon Stadium follows later in the year, and in November, Nintendo cements its approach to mainline Pokémon games by releasing Crystal, a special edition of the game with a handful of added features.



2004

THE REMAKES BEGIN

2004 sees the release of Nintendo's first true Pokémon remasters in the form of FireRed and LeafGreen for the Game Boy Advance. These remakes of the first generation games feature updated graphics, as well as full trading compatibility with Ruby and Sapphire. The games hit the shelves bundled with the GBA Wireless Adaptor, enabling wireless trades and battles for the first time in the series' history. This year also sees the debut of Pokémon Colosseum, a fully 3D RPG experience for the GameCube. But rather than the random encounters and long grass scavenging of old, Colosseum sees players 'snagging' Pokémon directly from rival trainers in their fight against the evil Cipher.

2005

2006

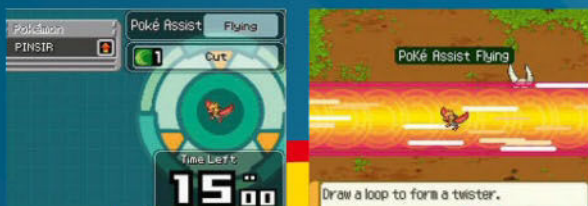


MYSTERIOUS CHALLENGER

Although Pokémon celebrates its tenth birthday in February 2006, you wouldn't know it by looking at the European release schedules. In May, Pokémon Link delivers Pokémon-branded puzzling to DS owners who simply couldn't handle the thought of matching four without having Pikachu in their eyeline. In November, however, Nintendo launches a new Pokémon franchise in the form of Pokémon Mystery Dungeon. Blue Rescue Team hits the DS, while Red Rescue Team launches on GBA, both tasking players with exploring dungeons and dispatching aggressors with the familiar turn-based battle system.

GM Feature

On The Cover!



DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

DS early adopters have to wait two full years until they have a fully-fledged Pokémon game exclusive to their clamshell handheld, but 2007 finally marks the launch of Diamond and Pearl, which introduce the Sinnoh region to the franchise's geographical canon, as well as adding online trading and battling for the first time. 2007 also sees the launch of Pokémon Ranger, a DS departure that takes significant liberties with the established franchise formula. Eschewing Pokémon battles altogether, Ranger instead has you using a 'styler' to capture the titular creatures with squiggles of your stylus.



2007

2008

2009

2010

2011



BRAWLING BEASTIES

Although there's no mainline Pokémon entry to celebrate in 2008 - not even a remake or special edition! - the battling critters remain omnipresent in Nintendo's lineup. In June, for instance, Super Smash Bros Brawl comes to the Wii, with Jigglypuff and Pikachu resuming their role in the lineup alongside newcomer Lucario. In July, the Pokémon Mystery Dungeon spinoff series receives its first sequel in the form of Explorers Of Time and Explorers Of Darkness for the DS, dusting off the dungeon-crawling gameplay for another outing. The Pokémon Ranger franchise also makes its return with Shadows Of Almia in November '08, further testing our fragile wrists with its stylus-based gameplay.



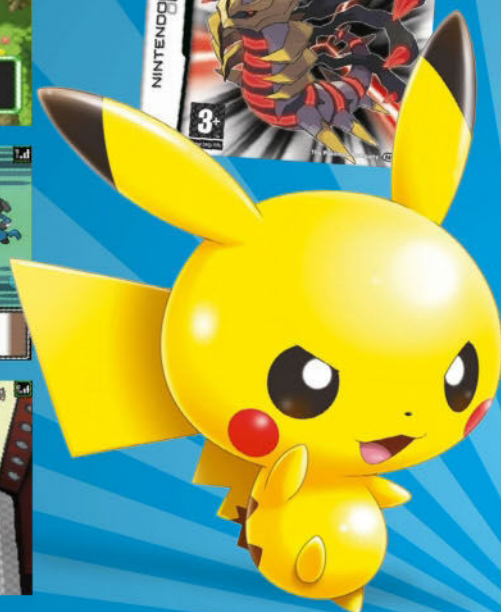
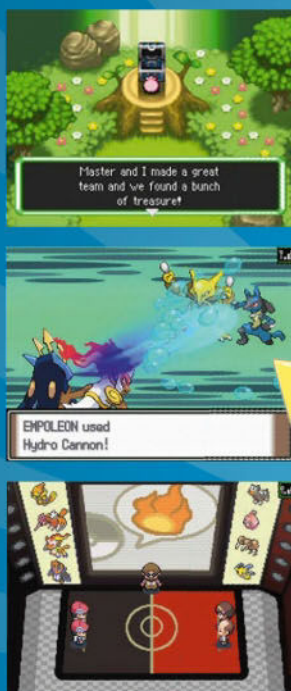
WALK IT OFF

March 2010 sees the release of Pokémon HeartGold and SoulSilver, a pair of enhanced remakes of the second generation of core games. But rather than simply sprucing up the graphics or gussying up the effects, Nintendo includes a pedometer with every copy that let players level up their party as they walk. In

November, meanwhile, fans of repeatedly drawing circles are delighted to receive the latest new instalment in the Pokémon Ranger franchise: Guardian Signs.

GOING PLATINUM

Pokémon Platinum hits European stores in May 2009, continuing the trend of 'enhanced editions' (or whatever you want to call them) following each pair of mainline releases. This tweaked version of Diamond and Pearl includes improved online functionality and the opportunity to experience the wonky physics and bizarre gravity of the Distortion World - true home of the legendary antimatter-wielding Pokémon Giratina. Nintendo also sees fit to unleash an improved version of its latest Pokémon Mystery Dungeon games on the world, launching Explorers Of Sky in November alongside Wii-exclusive top-down melee-brawler Pokémon Rumble.



SHADES OF GREY

Pokémon Black and White arrive in March 2011, and although they launch in the same month as the 3DS, the fifth generation of Pokémon RPGs is exclusive to the Nintendo's increasingly elderly DS. New features include the expected visual upgrades, as well as the introduction of a seasonal cycle that develops as you explore. Nintendo doesn't neglect its new hardware entirely, however, launching the Pokédex 3D in June. Then, in December, came Super Pokémon Rumble - a 3DS follow-up to Nintendo's 2009 Wii punch-up.





MY TYPE OF GAME

Typists sing a song of joy with one voice in September 2012, when Nintendo launches *Learn With Pokémon: Typing Adventure* for the DS – a platform without a keyboard. Undeterred, Nintendo includes a dinky wee Bluetooth keyboard with each copy of the game, which tasks players with spelling the names of Pokémon to tight time limits. Truly, a life skill. But this magnum opus is cruelly overshadowed when, just one month later, *Pokémon Black 2* and *White 2* are released for the DS. The launch of *Pokémon Dream Radar*, an augmented reality outing for the 3DS, just adds further insult to the Typing Adventure injury.



2012

2013

2014

2016

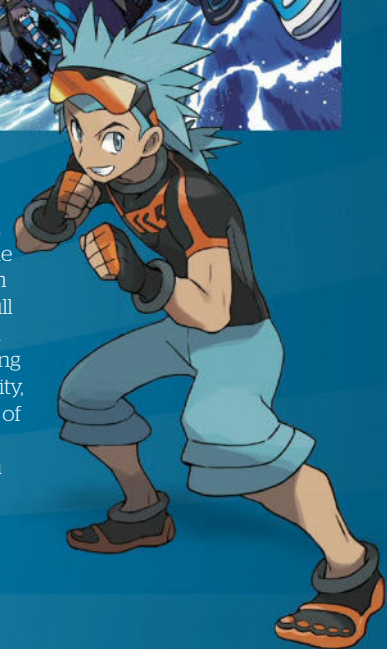
ALL AROUND THE WORLD

2013 marks a number of franchise firsts, including the first time a Pokémon game receives a simultaneous global launch. Whereas the gen one games took more than two years to make it to Europe, *Pokémon X* and *Y* receive a worldwide launch on 12 October. But that's by no means its only first – the main series' 3DS debut also introduces fully 3D graphics, Mega Evolutions, and fairy Pokémon to the franchise. Nintendo also continues its *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon* series with *Gates To Infinity* for the 3DS. And in August, *Pokémon Rumble U* becomes the first Wii U game to make use of the gamepad's NFC capabilities, shipping alongside dinky Pokémon figurines in a pre-Amiibo world.



I AM THE ALPHA

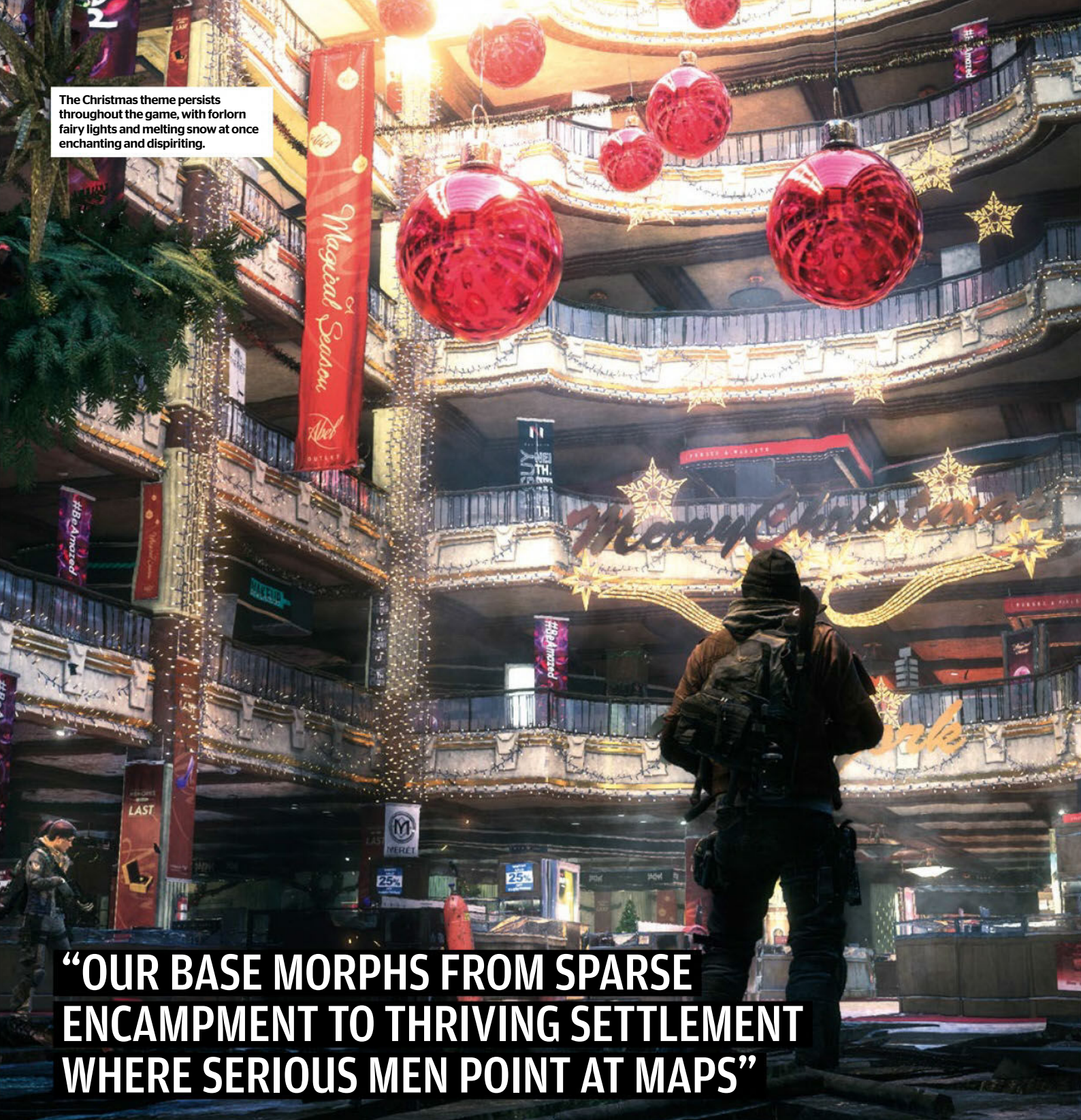
Far be it from us to belittle the likes of *Pokémon Bank*, *Pokémon Art Academy*, or *Pokémon Link: Battle*, but the biggest series release of 2014 is undoubtedly *Pokémon Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire* for the 3DS. These full remakes introduce some of the new mechanics from *Pokémon X* and *Y* to the eleven-year-old games, including the Mega Evolution system, player searching functionality, and fairy-type Pokémon. Similarly, the charming sprites of the original games were replaced with chunky, fully polygonal models. Your preference may be down to a matter of taste, but the flashy animated battles undoubtedly look tip-top in action.



WHATEVER NEXT

The future of Pokémon looks diverse, to say the least. Although there's no mainline series entry on Nintendo's release roster, it seems a safe bet that the company might have an enhanced edition of *X* and *Y* in the works – *Pokémon Z* seems to us a likely moniker. In the meantime, there's *Pokkén Tournament* to look forward to, due on 18 March for the Wii U. This fighting game will draw on Bandai Namco's *Tekken* expertise to render Pokémon pugilism with pyrotechnic flair, although it promises to emphasise a degree of accessibility over the technique and precision demanded by genre staples. While the game has been available in Japanese arcades for some time now, the home console version adds online scraps, and features new characters such as moody psychic Mewtwo. *Pokémon Go*, meanwhile, is an attempt to bring pocket monsters into the real world. This smartphone app will encourage players to scout their neighbourhood for collectible critters, while an optional wristband will even vibrate and light up to alert you that there's Pokémon in the vicinity. It seems that Nintendo remains as weirdly committed as ever to the link between Pokémon and walking. And then there's *Detective Pikachu: Birth Of A New Duo*, the Poké-police procedural we never knew we needed. It stars a fully voiced Pikachu wearing a deerstalker as he makes baritone quips and solves mysteries. Just imagine an electric-type Benedict Cumberbatch with the voice of George Takei and you're halfway there. No word yet on a western release for this downloadable 3DS adventure, which is unfortunate, but probably makes strong business sense, since the entire concept is insane. Japanese speakers with the appropriate hardware, however, should note that the game is out now on the Japanese eShop.

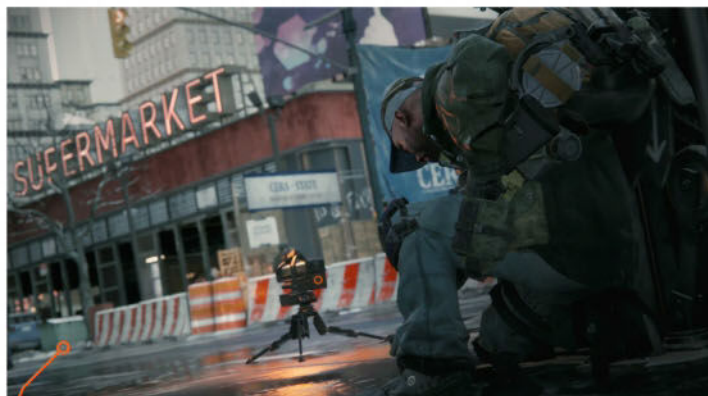
The Christmas theme persists throughout the game, with forlorn fairy lights and melting snow at once enchanting and dispiriting.



“OUR BASE MORPHS FROM SPARSE ENCAMPMENT TO THRIVING SETTLEMENT WHERE SERIOUS MEN POINT AT MAPS”



You can't be shot by other players unless you enter New York's central Dark Zone. Turns out, this tense, unpredictable area is aptly named. Here, all bets are off.



Equip your agent with hundreds of weapon types and skill combos. The auto turret is one of the most useful skills. Plonk it on floors or ledges and double your firepower.



GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!



Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Ubisoft
Developer Ubisoft **ETA** 8 March

THE DIVISION

Finally getting to explore New York without the tourists

Central Park is a mass grave. Madison Square Garden is a field hospital. You could hear a bullet shell drop in Times

Square. After contaminated banknotes spread a deadly disease on Black Friday, The Division's New York eschews post-apocalypse for refreshing mid-crisis. Some people are looting, some are killing, and the rest have legged it. You, a sleeper agent activated by the President, are trying to help.

Despite the immense promise of a present-day online RPG set inside what associate creative director Julian Gerighty calls "one of the most realistic portrayals of New York ever put in a videogame", an "almost 1:1" recreation of the city's downtown area which is entirely open from the start, there's one problem with The Division: it bears the Tom Clancy brand but it marks the start of an entirely

new series within the franchise, and no one really knows what it is. Are there specific servers to join? Can you steal your buddies' loot? What if everyone meets up? Can they form into a big ball and roll away? After our three-hour hands-on, our answers are no, no, and no (?), respectively.

Snow problem

We first create our avatar. Right now we're happy with blue warpaint and a goatee, but sparse options containing a handful of tattoos, scars, and hairstyles suggest you'll be charged for vanity items down the line. You spread XP across three categories. Skills run on a cooldown meter and you can equip two at once; perks are always-on modifiers; talents are combat enhancements that increase aspects such as damage or defence. Unlike most RPGs there are no classes - instead, you create one on-the-fly based on how you want to improve. And with everything further divided into the three categories of



Enemies come in all shapes and sizes: slow, shielded ones, charging, baseball-bat-wielding ones, minibosses in baseball padding, and more. It is New York, after all.



In the wake of the devastation, violent gangs have formed, and it's up to you to restore law and order. And, er, find awesome loot too, of course.

Just Division things

Four surprising details we noticed...

Dog

It's a pooping dog. And not just any pooping dog. This pooping dog kicks dirt over its poop like a real pooping dog. If you shoot the pooping dog, or for that matter a non-pooping dog, you even earn experience.



Snow

Snow is a constant. It blankets the ground and cars, and sometimes falls from the sky to obscure your vision. It even melts at points, gradually revealing patches of grey concrete and, yes, your footprints.



HUD

Like any good Ubisoft game (Ghost Recon, Splinter Cell), the HUD projects onto the world to save screen real estate. Take, for example, the "security wing" sign at the top of the screen.



People

You'll often see neutral NPCs glumly wandering the streets. Interaction is minimal, though. You can't shoot them - you know, you're the good guys. You can, however, raise your weapon to utterly terrify them.



medical, technology, and security, there's plenty to make each agent distinct.

After performing a few warm-up star jump emotes, we make for the Base Of Operations. Improving this forms an effective source of motivation. "Upgrading it to get all of the skills, perks, and talents will provide content way beyond the end of the campaign," says Gerighty. "On top of that you have side mission content, collectibles, and unlocking all of the Echoes to find out everything that happened to the city that we've hidden in the game." Completing missions morphs it from sparse encampment to thriving settlement where children play and serious men point at maps, complete with new merchants and quest-givers. Each player has a unique instance of it, so yours looks different from everyone else's.



If that's Destiny's Tower, the Dark Zone is the Crucible where players, if so inclined, engage in PvP action. The potential for unpredictability is obvious given the human element, a place where you could shoot teammates in the back and steal their loot, hide in a corner and whistle annoyingly down your mic, or stand at the entrance applauding people, but in our experience the area's

inherent tension leads to a reductive shoot-on-sight policy for all.

Dying day

Upon leaving (impressively load-screen-free), we hear shouting up ahead and find some bad guys holding pistols to the heads of two kneeling men. We engage, and here's where The Division stumbles: enemies take ages to die. When even hooded thugs can withstand several shotgun

"WHEN EVEN HOODED THUGS CAN WITHSTAND SEVERAL SHOTGUN BLASTS, WEAPONS FEEL MORE LIKE BB GUNS"



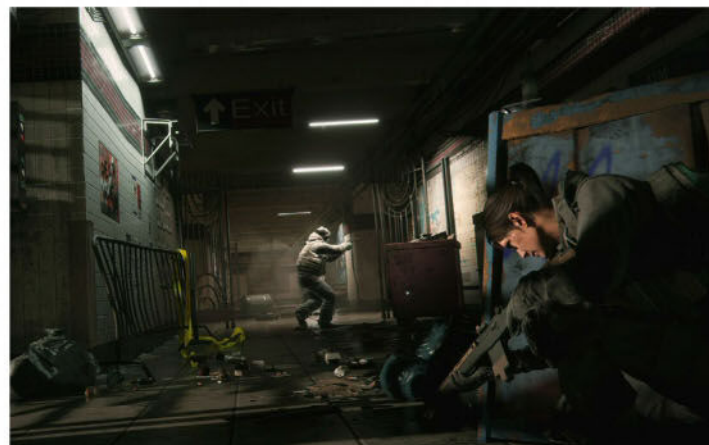
blasts, weapons feel more like BB guns. Gerighty and co. are still adjusting values: "Every encounter has to be thought of as a single-player challenge or as a cooperative challenge for up to four players. So obviously, every single encounter has to be adapted. We're changing the numbers, types, and strength of the enemies in front of us."

Indeed, foes have to deal with up to four human opponents shooting them, and if bullets had too much stopping power then firefights would either be unsatisfyingly brief or you'd mow down thousands. Your health is similarly massive - at one point we're crawling over to a teammate for help and an enemy is standing over us shooting us in the head repeatedly. Scenarios like this fly directly in the face of the game's otherwise authentic, grounded atmosphere and tone.

The realistic setting also prohibits marked differences between loot. We're



Random encounters keep you on your toes, whether it's looters, gang members, or escaped prisoners looking for fun. Danger can come from anywhere or anyone.

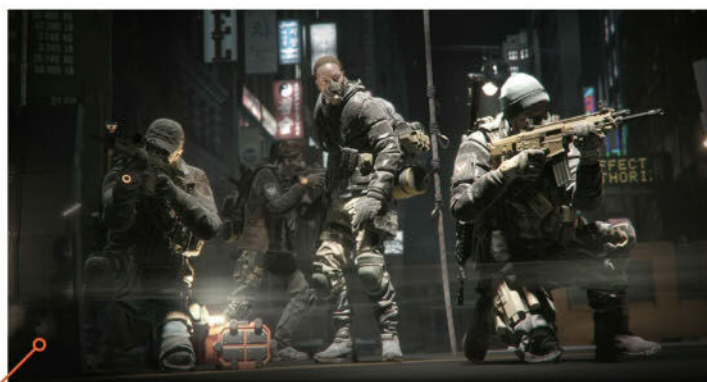




The more important missions are saved for New York's iconic structures. Here's the Park Avenue Viaduct leading to Grand Central Station.



The Division looks stunning in action. Does it look quite as good as this shot? No. No it does not. Still, you *can* close car doors as you crouch-walk past them.



Squads contain between two and four people. Although The Division excels in multiplayer, you can go solo offline and, unlike most MMOs, the game loses little.

talking about slightly-more-accurate-to-the-point-of-being-unnoticeable pistols, rather than legendary warhammers. There's also no room for stealth play, which seems a contradiction given the abundance of enemies you find with their backs turned. An announcement headshot or surprise melee whack alerts everyone in the vicinity and immediately forces you to go loud or go home.

Still, suspend disbelief and combat feels balanced. Streamlined cover-swapping lets you hold A/X and make a beeline to the safety provided by a car or electrical box, and pressing B/Circle prompts you to climb it and get a height advantage. It's tense and tactical, all about suppressing and flanking, using special abilities such as retractable riot shields and sentries, chomping a candy bar to remove status

effects such as fire or disorientation, and buffing teammates with health and damage boosters. Looters rushing with baseball bats, maddened blue collar workers wielding flamethrowers, and the glinting scopes of snipers on rooftops, all keep you on your toes.

Mission districts

Story missions take us to shootouts on the stunning spotlight-bathed court of Madison Square Garden and in the car-clogged Lincoln Tunnel, while unscripted encounters happen anywhere. We've been ambushed by gangs pouncing from trucks and shouting "Gotcha now!" and we've ambushed others, surrounding bandits in stores and garages. A glance at your holographic map heaving under activity icons proves this ravaged New York is anything but empty.

That's the game's crowning achievement. "Thinking of it as a global project, getting everything looking as good as it does and running online as well as it does with four players in co-op and with more players in the Dark Zone is a huge feat," says Gerigthy. Firefights,

whether scripted, random, or match-made, are thrilling, and the constant search for loot provides an addictive spark. But at the same time, it'll have to stand up to extensive sat-in-your-pants-at-2am sessions. **Ben Griffin**



PC graphics options are plentiful: multi-monitor support, an unlockable framerate, complete HUD customisation, and tweakable shadow quality and depth of field.

GM Instant Reaction

+ The city makes for a huge, intricately designed setting, with gorgeous interiors, exteriors, and plenty of secrets.

- Enemies who take a little too long to die result in combat losing some of its impact and urgency.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Ubisoft's ambitious MMO holds up admirably in our lengthy hands-on.



Blue Peter in 2029 Philadelphia takes a horrifying twist into homemade explosives. "Here's one we made blow up earlier."

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Deep Silver **Developer** Dambuster Studios **ETA** 17 May

HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION

Red Dawn of a new era or Kim Jong Un-derwhelming?



Philadelphia, 2029. It's a pitch black night as our team of four resistance fighters get ready to infiltrate a KPA stronghold and pilfer two trucks. The only lights come from roaring bin fires and sniper lasers that flicker over the buildings. The team slowly moves from building to building, ducking into hollowed-out rooms as patrols roll past. Then everything goes wrong. Maybe it's the lack of communication, or someone shooting too early, but within seconds it's over. Overthrowing an occupying Korean army is harder than you'd think.

This is the first taste of Resistance mode - Homefront's four-player co-op multiplayer - and it's designed to be tough. Maybe not Dark Souls brutal, but certainly hard enough to get the blood a few degrees higher. After all, you're a

team of four taking on an entire army. Clearly, the numbers are not in your favour. On top of that, a lot of modern shooter conventions have been dispensed with to really create an up-against-it feel. Recharging health? Sorry, you're going to have to rely on health packs. Grabbing enemy guns? Nope, they've got fingerprint locks. Oh, you need ammo? Best get scavenging then. Trying to play by running off and tackling your foes head-on leads to one outcome: merciless death.

Home & affray

To cope, you and your team are going to have to get creative, and it's here where Dambuster's semi-sequel excels. A push up on the D-Pad brings up your weapon to customise on-the-fly. Let's say you have an assault rifle, but you spy a crowd of KPA soldiers - the terrors who have occupied every street - who are just

asking to be turned into flesh confetti. Switch the main body of your gun to the limpet mine launcher and fire off a few explosive rounds. With only a few stragglers left in the distance, switch back and equip a scope to help pull off a few headshots. It's quick, simple, and gives you plenty of options on-the-fly while keeping the guerrilla warfare tone intact.

The environment also does the same. While not open-world like the main campaign, the levels are massive, giving you plenty of ways to approach your objectives, but filled with multiple paths to keep you one step ahead of the KPA. On Infiltration - the truck pilfering mission - you can either try to bulldoze your way into the compound or discover a rather sneaky underground passage that will allow you to pop up safely inside the gates. Getting to either entrance isn't a case of choosing one set path over

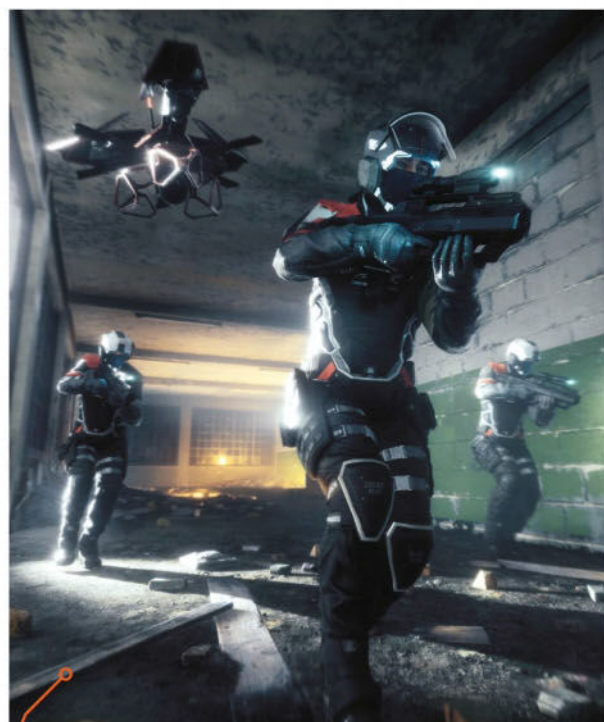
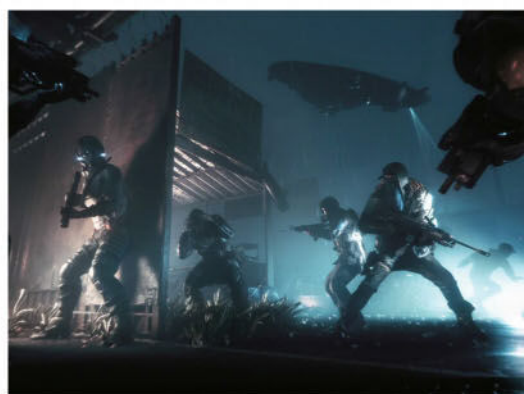




Simply push up on your D-Pad to quickly access your gun customisation menu. It's fast and very convenient, although it's sadly lacking the ability to add a Hello Kitty skin. Still, never mind. The mine launcher makes up for it.



Even revolutionaries have to take a break, hence this chap hanging around for you to choose your gear.



Stealth is a sensible option, but one mistake and you're likely to get a platoon up in your face before you can reload.

another; you use the city to your advantage. But while the map layout feels alive with possibilities, the art design is a throwback to the early brown 'n' grey days of last-gen. Obviously warzones aren't renowned for their vividness, but so far Philly looks as appealing to run around in as Coventry.

The level of experimentation and tactical freedom also extends to your comprehensive homemade explosives. You have four sets of 'nades - Hacking, Distraction, Pipe, and Molotov - and different ways of getting the job done. If you've got the high ground on an enemy, it makes plenty of sense to drop a fire-

spewing Molotov on their heads, whereas if you find yourself sneaking up on one of the many tanks you'll come up against, you can maintain a safe distance, strap a pipe grenade onto a remote-controlled car, and drive it underneath. The end result is both vehicles loudly going boom. Whether it's a carefully thought out plan or a moment of hasty improvisation, Homefront allows for more murderous creativity than expected.

Yawn-amic Pistol

Despite having plenty of positives, Homefront's biggest problem is that the core gunplay is merely... adequate.

Falling more into the twitchy camp of shooters, it delivers a disappointing lack of visual feedback. Enemies who get shot just don't react like they've had a fatal lead injection, and because you're usually encountering huge crowds of foes, explosives become your go-to weapon of choice. There's still some enjoyment to be had in pulling off a slick headshot, and weapon add-ons we didn't get a chance to use might make us feel we've got something a bit more powerful to utilise later on, but as it stands in our playthrough, pulling the trigger invokes more shrugs than grins.

Which is a pretty big concern for a shooter, especially one as unexpectedly promising as Homefront. There are a lot of neat little touches and empowering moments scattered throughout the few co-op missions played, hinting at the promise of light strategy and rewarding teamwork, but it needs to add a bit more power to its fire if it wants us to keep up the fight. **Ben Tyrer**

"THE MAP LAYOUT IS ALIVE WITH POSSIBILITIES, BUT SO FAR PHILLY LOOKS AS APPEALING TO RUN AROUND IN AS COVENTRY"

GM Instant Reaction

+ Weapon customisation is fast, with plenty of room for experimentation. Co-op levels are huge and rich with opportunities.

- Far too much grey makes it uninspiring to wade through, and the standard gunplay is yet to incite much excitement.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Intriguing flourishes promise depth but combat leaves us wanting.

Format XO, PS4, PC Publisher Square Enix Developer IO Interactive ETA 11 March

HITMAN

Now you Seize me, now you don't

As pairs of high cheekbones prowl the catwalk, a secret auction behind closed doors sells identities of undercover personnel to the highest bidder. IO has shown Showstopper before – the biggest stage Hitman's ever seen – but this is the first time anyone has been allowed to play it. Or, in our case, break it.

The target is Viktor Novikov, oligarchical leader of spy ring IAGO. Sharp-suited Agent 47 doesn't need a disguise to infiltrate his Parisian fashion event, even getting compliments from guests who

probably see his barcode tattoo as next season's hottest look, so we scout the palace's picturesque gardens in peaceful anonymity. Unlike in Absolution where you often felt hunted, here you're very much the hunter. A posh snob angrily pleading with parking attendants in a hail of insults and 'do you know who I am?' provides enough distraction for us to tail a waistcoated waiter to his van, garrott him, and steal his clothes. The guard he was speaking to moments earlier is unconvinced, which is fair because we're literally a different person.

Suspicious minds

See, Hitman's suspicion mechanic is much improved from Absolution, where

every outfit turned heads whether anyone actually saw you change or not.

Here a white bar fills faster the closer you are. Too much visibility and onlookers enter a suspicious state, tailing you going all "Hey there, buddy". Try leading them into a toilet and flushing their head down the bog. People naturally have different levels of interest,

so if you try and pass yourself off as a guard's patrol buddy he'll cotton on, but if on the other hand people have no logical reason to be wary, they won't be.

We throw a coin to bait a roadie and swing a wrench at another with a horribly wet 'ding!'. After descending stairs through a wine cellar and into the kitchen, options at a stove allow us to

"WE ELECTRIFY A SPOTLIGHT, PUNCTURE AN OIL CANISTER, AND RIG A GENERATOR TO EXPLODE, OBSERVING THE CHAOS FROM AFAR"



47's walking speed is perfect – just fast enough that you don't feel like awkwardly running everywhere.



IO rationalises the unusual pricing structure by saying it prevents unnecessary waiting.



poison a bubbling stew or tamper with it. Lucky we've kept that wrench.

Gas now leaking, a new command pops up: 'press X to turn on'. We can't resist. Boom! Agent 47 launches backwards in the blast and we restart.

Trap fight

Returning to the grounds wielding an ever-versatile screwdriver we electrify a spotlight, puncture an oil canister, and rig a generator to explode, observing the chaos from afar in the pink-shirt-and-scarf ensemble we stole from a stylist who's going to have a very sore head tomorrow. Men come with bodybags and drag the deceased into a quiet corner. Events are localised, meaning people on the other side of the level remain unaware unless you do something silly like whip out an AK-47, at which point you'll hear them communicate your current disguise and position.

After an hour we don't see half the level has to offer, and it would be disappointing if we did. See, IO calls Hitman the world's first 'episodic Triple-A game', which means it's staggering the

release of maps through 2016. You can pay upfront and receive levels free when they roll out, or buy each as it comes. For the first release, Showstopper will be Hitman's sole stage besides the prologue, and while a confusing pricing model has changed between every preview we've published and requires an infographic to explain, the good thing is it's blooming massive. ■ **Ben Griffin**

GM Instant Reaction

+ A return to creative chameleonic kills as dark as they are funny, such as posing on catwalks and poisoning cocktails.

- The staggered release schedule makes you wait for the full game. Besides the tutorials, Paris is the sole launch stage.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Hitman's largest stage yet brims with killer potential.

Unorthodox offense

Four ways we failed to kill our target

Sabre rattling

Backstage, we smash a glass case to obtain a sabre. Unfortunately everyone hears because breaking glass is quite loud, so we have to go stabbing. It's hard work: this level has hundreds of characters.



Pint pounding

You can use 'blend in' to stop people staring. Dressed as a bartender we mix a cocktail for Novikov himself. It's not poisoned, since it would probably look a bit suspicious if he suddenly keeled over.



Roadie running

Setting off the fire alarm triggers a swarm of panicked fashionistas to evacuate. This gives us time to drop the lighting rig down with an almighty crash... but Novikov's already left with everyone else.



Mean mugging

The most inventive interaction comes when you knock off the show's lead model and take to the runway. 47 can strut his stuff and people are none the wiser. What? Oh, right, we're supposed to be killing...

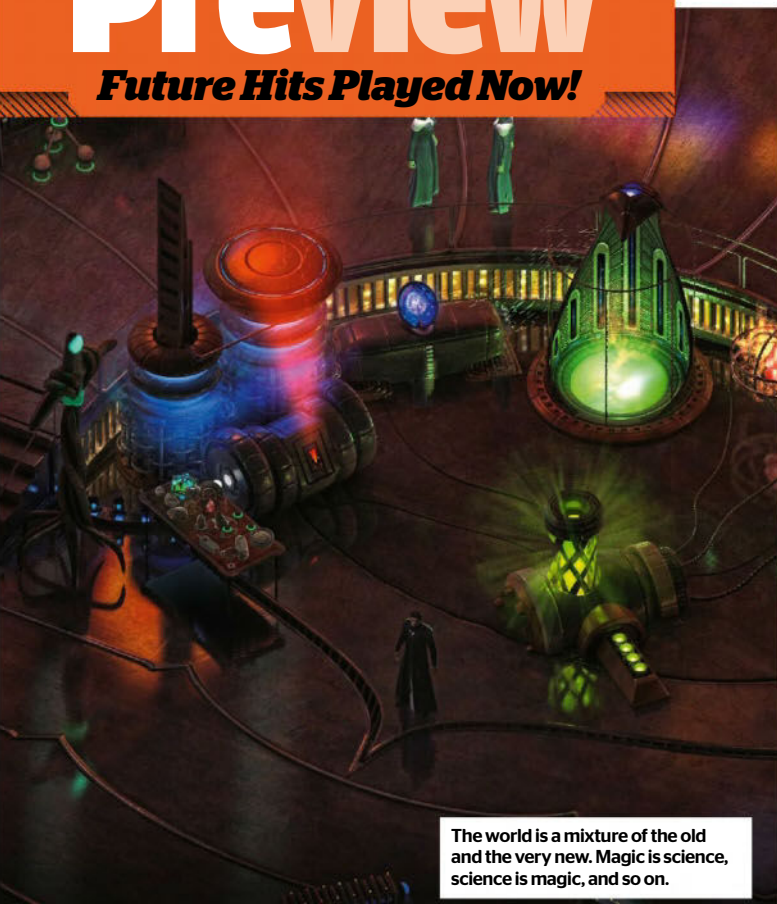


Throughout 2016 you'll play the part of a true globetrotting assassin, stalking the streets and social functions of Japan, Italy, Morocco, and the US.



GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!



The world is a mixture of the old and the very new. Magic is science, science is magic, and so on.



The beta version currently available in Early Access is missing quite a lot of content, including shops. There's still plenty to sink your teeth into, however.



Your journey takes you to Sagus Cliffs, a city touched by your former selves.



Format PC **Publisher** InXile Entertainment
Developer InXile Entertainment **ETA** Summer 2016

TORMENT: TIDES OF NUMENERA

Seventeen years on, Torment returns - and it's weirder than ever

Sitting somewhere between traditional RPG and a choose-your-own-adventure, this is a cerebral journey into

Earth's far, far future. You're a consciousness newly born into a body discarded by an elusive immortal called The Changing God, hunted through time and space by a transdimensional force called The Sorrow. And it gets weirder from there.

Torment: Tides of Numenera is a spiritual successor to 1999's Planescape: Torment, a game that took the classic PC RPG formula and gave it philosophical purpose. It had a single question at its core: 'what can change the nature of a man?' This new Torment has a different query: 'what does one life mean?'

After a fatal injury sustained in the intro, you rebuild your personality,

bit-by-bit, through flashbacks and visions encountered in the recesses of your own psyche. This determines your personality, but also how you approach problem-solving, as the two are closely linked in the Numenera pen-and-paper RPG system on which this game is based.

Grave meaning

Although the isometric perspective and retro prerendered art recall Pillars Of Eternity, combat is much less of a focus. It's certainly present - and uses a similar 'real time with pause' system - but is also optional. If you want to talk your way out of a confrontation - or even convince an opponent to step down mid-brawl - you can do

that, or at least try. That's the heart of what the 'Torment' name entails: a sequence of interesting decisions with complex consequences that, approached honestly, tell you something about who you are. It's great to have the series back. **Chris Thursten**



Instant Reaction

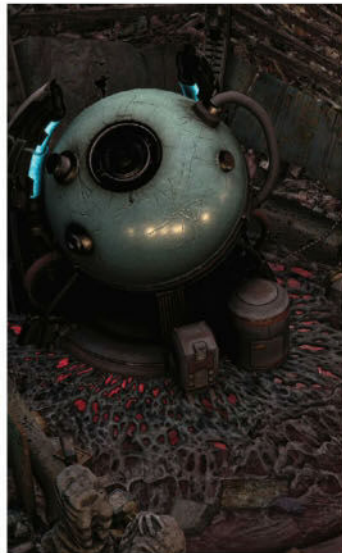
+ Great writing, a highly original setting and a brilliant premise: this RPG successor is shaping up well.

- The beta is currently unfinished and buggy, so hold off on the Early Access version for the best experience.

THRILL-O-METER



A smart mix of old and new - but you'll need to bring your brain.



Reviving ancient technological (or magical?) devices means delving into your own memories to discover their real nature and purpose.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Heart Machine
Developer Heart Machine **ETA** Spring 2016

HYPER LIGHT DRIFTER

A link to the outcast

If you've been around as long as us, there are some cultural touchstones across both anime and games that cut deep.

The stark red leather-clad action and body horror of *Akira*? The symbolism-strewn personal drama of *Evangelion*? The weirdly welcoming yet equally repellent world of *Nausicaä*? This overhead action-RPG, by Alex Preston of Heart Machine, consciously taps into these cultural barometers as it builds its own mystical and hard-as-nails outing.

Those inspirations are evident in the arresting art style, but under this welcoming veneer is a story, and a focus on masterful play, more akin to *Zelda-meets-Dark Souls*. Preston's tale of a "desperately ill character in search of a cure" in a "very foreign, ravenous, ruined land" will have veterans of *Lordran* and *Drangleic* nodding sagely and salivating in equal measure.

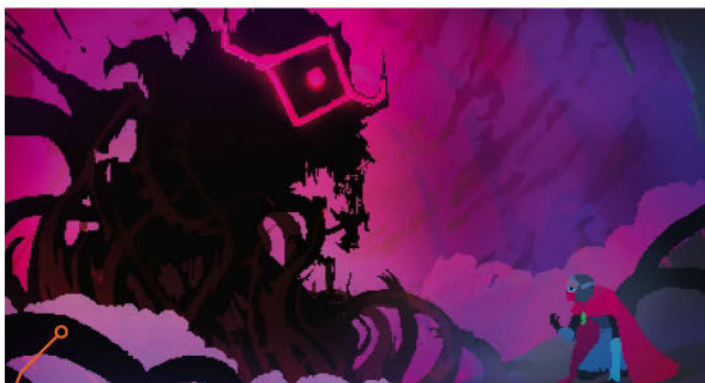
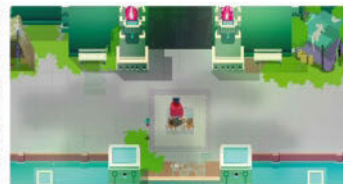
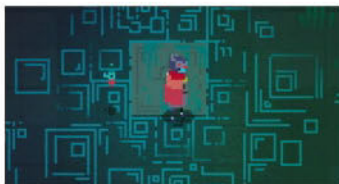
This will be a very hard game, with bosses that can kill you in one hit, no invincibility during dodge animations,

and a huge variety of enemies, all with attack patterns to memorise and master. But for all our name-dropping, *Hyper Light Drifter* is definitely its own game.

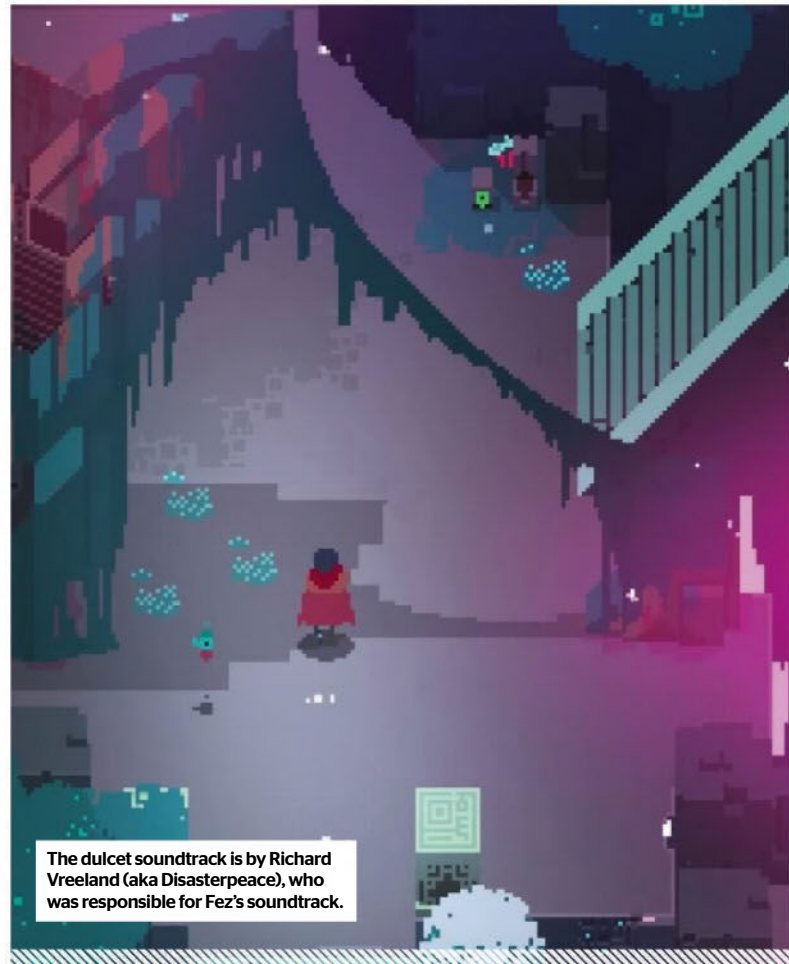
Drift me up

Much has changed since we first saw it in late 2014. "Making games is an iterative process, and takes incredible amounts of intense, sustained thought and exposure to testing, internal, and external," notes Preston. "While some designs may sound great on paper, in practice, once they interact with other variables in a game, may not be as tight. The shield mechanic was ditched after much intense prototyping and discussion."

What we're left with is a fiendishly intense scrapper, with a pleasingly varied combat system. You might be darting to and fro with fast melee strikes, spraying and praying with a pistol, or carving yourself some room to hold still while your rail gun charges for a pleasingly beefy death burst. With all this going for it, there's every chance that *Hyper Light Drifter* could go on to become a cultural touchstone all of its own. **■ Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman**



Preston on Kickstarter: "Transparency can be difficult. I think most humans have an inherent aversion to making oneself vulnerable, [which] transparency demands."



The dulcet soundtrack is by Richard Vreeland (aka Disasterpeace), who was responsible for *Fez*'s soundtrack.

GM Instant Reaction

+ Fine-tuned combat and a visual feast for the senses. Plus a lush soundtrack utilising the electro talents of Disasterpeace.

- Difficulty without tangible progress can easily veer into frustration. The balance will have to be spot-on.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Not long to wait now for what could be an indie highlight of 2016.



The floating doodad which follows the eponymous Drifter around the gameworld helps by unlocking doors and by blinking whenever your health is low.

GM Preview

Eyes-on with Future Hits!

The orange-clad chap is Steel, a blue-skinned beefcake who carries a great lump of metal into battle with him. Equally handy for blocking attacks and clobbering foes.



Format PS4, PC Publisher Epic Games Developer Epic Games ETA Winter

PARAGON

MOBA mechanics meet third-person gunplay in this free-to-play fusion from Epic Games

MOBAs are big business these days, as anyone at Riot, Valve, or Blizzard will tell you. It's understandable, then, that just about every studio under the sun is pining for a portion of that sweet competitive multiplayer pie, and it also explains why MOBA influences seem to be popping up all over the place lately. So it's no surprise to discover that Epic is getting in on the action. What is surprising, however, is how different its interpretation of the genre is shaping up to be.

Paragon is a multiplayer online battle arena that offers direct, third-person control of every character – a blend of MOBA and shooter, then, and it's even spiked with a dose of CCG for good measure. So, you select your hero and emerge from your base to survey a very

typical MOBA scene. You're faced with three lanes, several towers, and a jungle, and set off to destroy the enemy HQ.

But while the trappings are familiar, the effect is very different. A third-person camera grounds the action, lending the stage an unusual sense of scale and physicality. Elevation provides tactical opportunities too, as the top lanes offer a commanding view of lower sections.

And depending on which hero takes your fancy, Paragon can offer a play experience that feels similarly unmoored from MOBA convention. Murdock, for instance, looks for all the world like he's

missed a connecting flight on his way to a Gears Of War game, and his Buckshot and Plasma Bolt powers do little to discourage the comparison. Feng Mao, meanwhile, is at the other end of the spectrum entirely – a purple-skinned bruiser wielding a fearsome naginata and some formidable eyebrows.

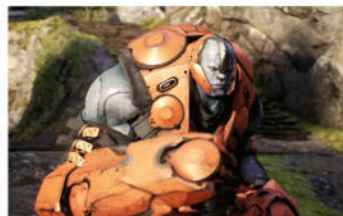
Get decked

Each character can be further upgraded, of course, but here Paragon breaks with convention once again. Instead of an in-game item shop that lets players trade gold for mystical knickknacks over the

course of a match, Epic's effort makes use of cards. It's an attempt to introduce a further layer of strategy to the game, forcing players to make considered trade-offs rather than being able to simply optimise their build against whatever opposition they're facing.

As such, you'll have to carefully consider the deck you take into battle. It should play to your character's strengths, of course, but it'll also need to be able to counter a broad swathe of enemy builds to boot. Over the course of each match, you'll earn card XP which can be used to equip more cards to your character – both passive buffs and active abilities – or upgrade the ones you've already equipped. And when the game is complete, you'll earn currency that can be exchanged for more booster packs.

If all of that sounds a little dry, it's worth bearing in mind that Paragon is still a game in which you can cut a swathe through the opposition with your





future-katana or summon space boulders to crush your foes. It's a game that places almost as much emphasis on spectacle as it does on strategy, rendering your tactical throwdowns in unparalleled detail. Compared to the grounded heft of Paragon, the current crop of MOBAs can look rather limp and detached.

MO' beta blues

Paragon's closed beta currently offers a choice of 13 heroes, from agile archers to swole space marines. That number may pale in comparison to the hundred or more on offer in other, more established

MOBAs, but Epic has outlined plans to release characters and content at a brisk clip once the game moves out of its closed beta phase. That transition is currently scheduled for Spring, when Paragon will move into what Epic is calling a 'paid early-access' phase on PC and PS4. Then, in Summer, an open beta will enable anyone to hop aboard free of charge.

What's more, PS4 and PC players will be duking it out on the same servers - handy if your friends list is scattered



across a variety of platforms, but potentially problematic if the mouse and keyboard combo proves more precise than the pad. Epic reckons it's nailed MOBA gameplay on a controller, but it'll be impossible to truly judge until the game is

opened up to a wider pool of players. Regardless, there are clear upsides to this kind of close integration, and the plan is for progress to carry over seamlessly between platforms, letting you play on whichever system you happen to be nearest.

As with so many of Epic's plans for Paragon, it's ambitious, and it remains to be seen whether the studio can find a place in such a crowded market. But this is no me-too MOBA - it's a genuine attempt to shake things up. Come summer, everyone will be able to judge the wisdom of all these novel additions for themselves. ■ **James Nouch**



SUPER, THANKS FOR ASKING

We sit down to chat with Paragon's Creative Director, Steve Superville

Q Epic as a studio is most closely associated with the shooter genre. What made you guys decide to enter the MOBA space?

A When we were talking about what our next game would be, we knew we wanted it to be competitive. For us right now, the most engaging competitive games are MOBAs. We knew that we could put a different spin on that, using our experience with shooters, and create something new.

Q What makes the free-to-play model a good fit for Paragon?

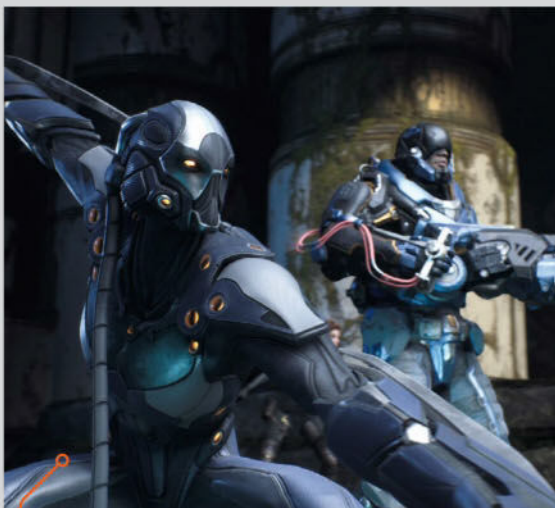
A Paragon is about experimentation and mastery, and so a low barrier to entry is great for getting people in to find their footing and into the fight. Our plan is to be respectful of our players' time, and give them great value.

Q What sparked the decision to bring Paragon to PS4, and how will it bring console players up to speed on the genre basics?

A We knew from the start that we wanted to bring Paragon to PS4. PS4 players are just looking for great games, regardless of genre, so we're excited to be one of the few MOBAs on the platform. As for onboarding, we're looking at ways to get players in the game. It's important for us to not compromise the things that make MOBA gameplay great, but we know it can be scary for new players. We're already getting feedback from non-MOBA players who've played in our Online Tests, and we hope to have welcome, straightforward solutions for helping them get into the fight and have fun.



Alongside all the usual MOBA map structures, you'll find Harvesters, which generate card XP as a match goes on.



As per genre convention, each side boasts a regularly-spawning army of AI-controlled minions that automatically attack foes.

GM Instant Reaction

+ A pleasingly novel take on an increasingly crowded genre, all rendered with the shiny lustre you'd expect from Epic.

- Can the studio master the tricky MOBA balancing act? And what the heck is 'paid early access' for a F2P game?

THRILL-O-METER



It's got graphical grunt in spades - let's hope it's got systemic smarts.

"YOU'LL HAVE TO CAREFULLY CONSIDER YOUR DECK - IT SHOULD PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS, BUT ALSO COUNTER ENEMY BUILDS"

The essential magazine for PlayStation 4 owners



On sale now!

In print. On iOS. On Android

<http://bit.ly/officialplaystation>



Available on the
App Store

Find it in the Official PlayStation Magazine App



The game was formerly subtitled 'And The Wizard Of Booze', but negative reaction forced the change.

Format PS4, PC Developer Atelier Games
Publisher FDG Entertainment ETA Winter 2016

MONSTER BOY AND THE CURSED KINGDOM

Is it any Wonder?

It began life as a Kickstarter campaign for 'Flying Hamster II', a 2D platformer heavily inspired by 1989's classic Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap. But having picked up a publisher and won the approval and support of Wonder Boy's creator, Ryuichi Nishizawa, this retro effort is now a revival of the series in all but name.

You play as Jin, a boy who is turned into a pig by his eccentric uncle Nabu (incidentally, said pig smokes a cigarette during his idle animation, which is an unhealthy but fan-pleasing throwback to one of the NPCs in the original series). Then, as you beat various bosses, you'll be able to transform into different creatures, including a snake, frog, and lion. Each animal will have a unique ability, including tongue swinging, wall-walking, and being able to sniff out secrets in the environment.

The colourful 2D action has some RPG and Metroidvania elements for

depth, but Atelier Games is keen to emphasise the accessibility of the experience. Vintage side-scrollers were all about great animation and unforgettable music, and this game aims to recapture that classic platformer essence. Producer Thomas Kern describes it as "like popping in a cartridge". Brilliant.

Monster mash

The Wonder Boy games were full of secrets if you knew where to look, and that tradition's upheld here, as Monster Boy subverts platform clichés and rewards unconventional play. Is that a lethal pitfall, or is it an amazing secret

passageway? Is that a deadly dragon's mouth, or is it an amazing secret passageway? Only one way to find out...

Originally slated for a 2015 release, the game has been held back as ever more impressive elements are added. It's now even going to feature music from Yuzo Koshiro - legendary composer of Streets Of Rage II fame. Suffice to say his work probably wouldn't have featured in Flying Hamster II. **Justin Towell**



Instant Reaction

+ It looks a lot like Shantae And The Pirate's Curse, which itself looks like Monster World IV. So that's a good sign!

- Wonder Boy wasn't really the most exciting platform hero of the '80s/'90s. Something about a plumber and a hedgehog...?

THRILL-O-METER



Shantae is going to have some serious 2D competition this year.

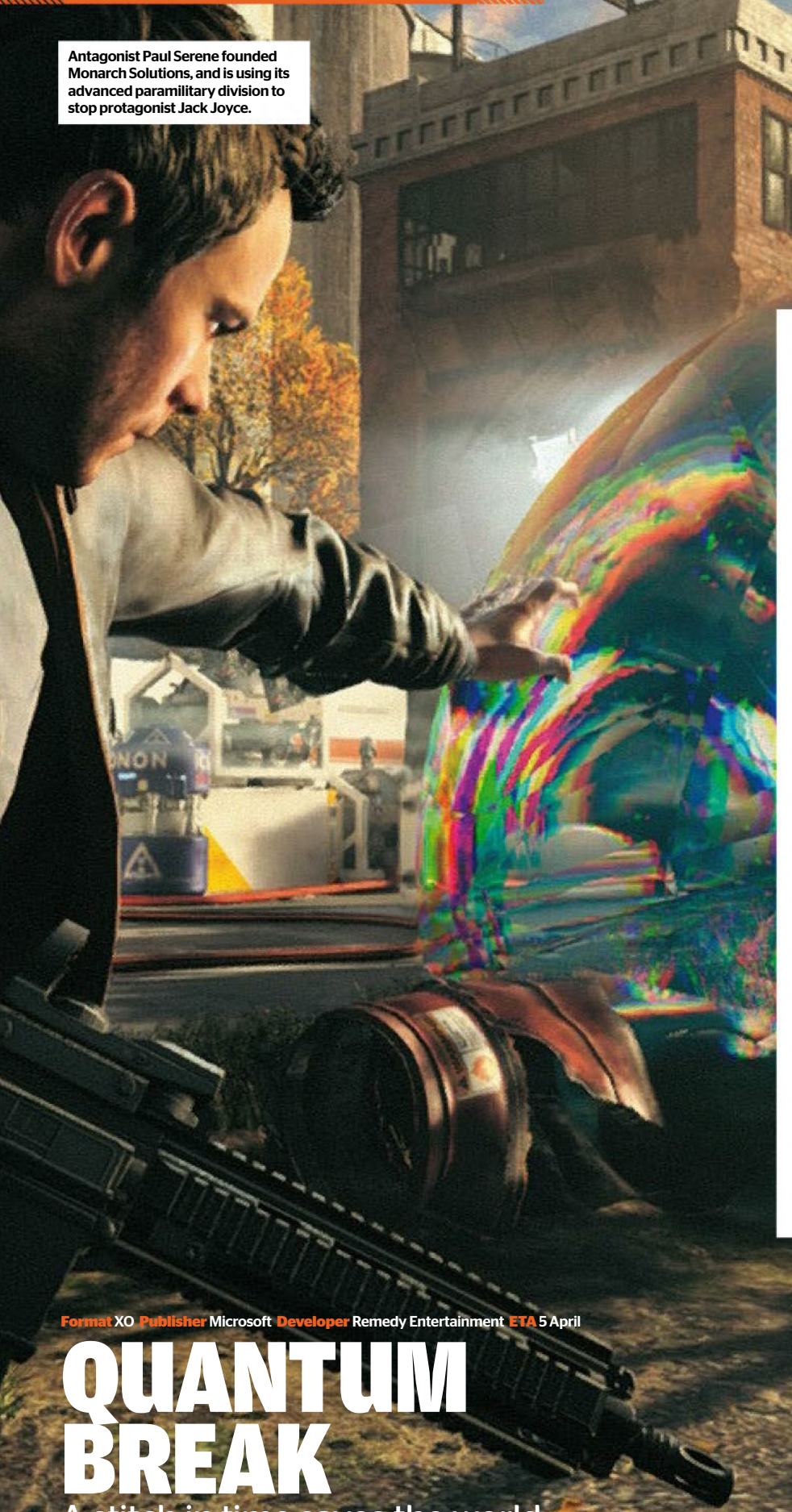


Never the best idea to buy a house built right over a sea of molten lava. Clearly this bloke hasn't watched enough episodes of Location, Location, Location.

GM Preview

Eyes-on With Future Hits!

Antagonist Paul Serene founded Monarch Solutions, and is using its advanced paramilitary division to stop protagonist Jack Joyce.



When Jack Joyce first strides into a courtyard filled with uniformed goons and waist-high walls, you'd be forgiven for letting out a long, low groan. But Microsoft's next big exclusive is no normal cover shooter. It's one part game, one part TV show, and one part time-travelling choose-your-own-adventure story.

Time itself is broken, y'see, fractured by a temporal experiment gone awry. At the centre of all the chronological craziness are Jack Joyce and Paul Serene, erstwhile buddies played by X-Men star Shawn Ashmore and Game Of Thrones' Littlefinger himself, Aidan Gillen. Both find themselves imbued with wild new powers, but while Joyce is out to fix all the temporal anomalies, grinning antagonist Serene takes the line that the end of time would be best for all concerned. Joyce's actions form Quantum Break's gameplay, while Serene's perspective is explored in live-action cut-scenes (perhaps more appropriately dubbed 'shows' as they pack full-fat Hollywood budgets, and each of the four 'episodes' is up to 25 minutes long) that punctuate the action.

Max Payne and Alan Wake developer Remedy remains as committed to narrative ambition as ever then, and its latest project demands not only strong writing but also believable and charismatic performances from its cast. "Working on games, it's not unusual to run into actors who feel that because it's 'just a game', they can phone it in. I think it's less common these days, but it's certainly not unheard-of," explains Remedy's story team manager and writer Mikko Rautalahti. "So having our cast come in with such passion and genuine interest in Quantum Break was really exciting - that's not something you can take for granted."

But an engaged cast counts for little if the game and the 'show' fail to interact in meaningful ways. Fortunately, the two tell a story in

**"GRAPHICAL ARTIFACTS
AND AURAL ERRORS SELL
THE SENSATION THAT TIME
ITSELF IS DISINTEGRATING"**

Format XO Publisher Microsoft Developer Remedy Entertainment ETA 5 April

QUANTUM BREAK

A stitch in time saves the world



Some of Jack's enemies make use of Monarch technology to deploy their own time-manipulation powers, making things even less predictable.



tandem, exploring events from differing perspectives and folding player choice into the drama. "We wanted to create an interactive narrative experience, and [the] time-travel story as a genre felt like a perfect choice - the fundamental question of 'can you change things' or 'is the past fixed as it has already happened?'" says the studio's creative director Sam Lake. "From that came the concept of junctions in time, moments where you can choose which timeline becomes the reality in your Quantum Break universe."

Disinte-great

These junction points give players the opportunity to shape the course of the narrative, but moment-to-moment gameplay is already pleasingly open, encouraging improvisation as you manipulate time to outwit your foes. You might slow it down, dashing around foes at what appears to them as super-speed. Or perhaps you'll pause a cluster of enemies altogether before unloading an entire magazine at your leisure. The choice is yours, but all of Joyce's abilities look suitably striking, thanks to the work of Remedy art director Janne Pulkkinen and his team. "Visualising time breaking down has been a great challenge!" says Pulkkinen. "We researched a lot of visual art that has somehow dealt with time such as slit-scan and long-exposure photography, along with various works of cubism and futurism. From these influences we've built tools for simulating time distortions that affect everything in the world."

Joyce's powers are accompanied by all manner of crackles and starts, with graphical artifacts and aural errors selling the sensation that time itself is disintegrating. In-game events known as 'stutters', wherein time violently fits back and forth like a piece of jammed machinery, display Remedy's aesthetic innovation. "Glitch art, with its celebration of error, has also been a big inspiration for us when creating the unpredictable and dangerous time stutters," continues Pulkkinen. "Excited by synaesthetic music visualisations, we're using audio analysis to drive the distortion events, hopefully creating something complex and dynamic that feels like an actual force of nature."

The test, then, will likely be whether all Quantum Break's aspirations come together into a meaningful story. There isn't much time to wait before we see for ourselves. ■ **James Nouch**

GM Instant Reaction

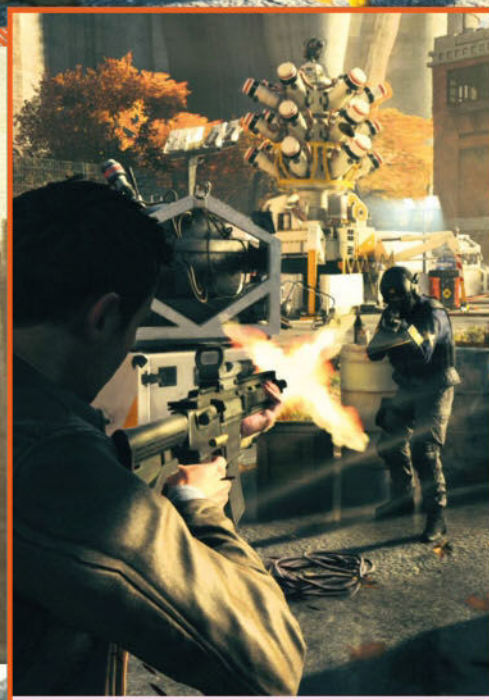
+ An array of time-bending abilities promises to add fizz and visual flair to familiar cover shooter conventions.

- Remedy's storytelling ambitions could get the better of it here - time-travel narratives are famously tricky.

THRILL-O-METER



Striking science-fiction backed by a strong cast and unique visuals.



The game's ambition extends far beyond pop-and-drop tactics, and all that action is further broken up with environmental puzzles in which Joyce must control time in order to safely navigate dangerous environments.

GM Preview

Future Hits Played Now!



The PC version supports Oculus Rift, and PlayStation VR support is being considered as a post-release update.



The PS4 version runs at 1080p, while Xbox One is targeting 900p. But both will run at butter-smooth 60fps. Erm, not that you want to be driving on butter, naturally.



The Ferrari FXX-K is the star of the show and the box art. We want five.



Format PS4, XO, PC Publisher 505 Games
Developer Kunos Simulazioni ETA Spring 2016

ASSETTO CORSA

Look, you used to think 'Gran Turismo' was a bit of a mouthful too

Never heard of this racing sim? No? That's ok - it just means you're in for a treat now. Already a hit on PC, it's speeding on to consoles this spring. We've played it on PS4, and it's simply the most realistic racing sim we've ever experienced.

other racing sims, as there's a greater sensation of feedback on how the tyres are gripping the track. Granted, we tested this early console version with a top-of-the-range Thrustmaster steering wheel with force feedback powerful enough to imperil your thumbs in a crash, but even so, the car handling is predictable, assured, and supremely smooth.

Corsa can

Sadly, there's no wet weather or night racing here, and the list of cars and tracks is smaller than in GT6 and Forza 6, though rich in big names all the same.

And with 16-player online racing and mechanical and aesthetic damage (albeit some limited by manufacturers' terms), Assetto Corsa is no slouch in the features department. Basically, we'd buy it just for the Ferrari FXX-K hotlap at Spa. It's probably the closest we'll ever get to the real thing. **Justin Towell**

The reason is simple: this is professional simulation technology turned into a game. The state-of-the-art physics engine is used by the likes of Ferrari and Dallara to help them develop real cars, and professional drivers play the game for practice. From a gamer's point of view, that ultra-realism means super fast control response and a wonderful, solid sensation of driving.

The benefit of this assuredness is that it's easier to stay on the road than in most



Instant Reaction

+ Based on a couple of hours' play, it's the most realistic racing sim we've ever played on anything ever. Ever.

- Keeping up with the AI cars in races is really difficult (but not impossible), even on medium difficulty. You'd better practice!

THRILL-O-METER



Assetto Corsa feels so real, it's a genuine track day alternative.



The team is looking to support as many steering wheel peripherals as possible. These really help the sensation of realism - which in turn helps you stay on the road...



Format PS4, PC **Pub** Capcom
Dev Capcom **ETA** May
UMBRELLA CORPS

Leaving the question of whether the world was really clamouring for a fast-paced, team-based take on Resident Evil to one side for a moment, it's clear that Capcom is at least committed to delivering a distinctive spin on the competitive multiplayer shooter. Third-person traversal, brutal melee takedowns, first-person gunfire, and wacky gadgetry all rub shoulders in these 3-on-3 showdowns, which take place across zombie-strewn stages drawn from across the franchise's storied history, including an RE4 map. ■



Format PS4, PC **Pub** Ys Net
Dev Ys Net **ETA** December 2017
SHENMUE III

Although Yu Suzuki's much-publicised Kickstarter campaign has generated a minor series of brouhahas, it's yet to produce all that much by way of an actual look at the game itself. And while that trend looks set to continue for the time-being, a handful of work-in-progress screenshots have emerged from a recent public appearance made by the series' creator, and they seem to show Ryo and Shenhua exploring the Chinese countryside. More importantly, however, it looks like Ryo still has that badass leather jacket. ■



Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Three Fields
Dev Three Fields **ETA** May
DANGEROUS GOLF

Nailing a wedge shot onto the green may be satisfying, but it doesn't provide the same sense of spiritual fulfilment you'd get from, say, destroying an exquisite chandelier. Fortunately, a team of former-Criterion developers has brought the two together at last, in a golf game that rewards destruction of property rather than careful club selection. You might tee off in a palatial ballroom, for instance, and drive your flaming golf ball through a king's ransom of irreplaceable, fragile heirlooms. It's Tiger Woods meets Burnout 3 meets a bull in a china shop. ■



Format PC **Pub** Frontier Developments
Dev Frontier Developments **ETA** Nov
PLANET COASTER

It may be more than 11 years since Frontier released Rollercoaster Tycoon 3, but the game still inspires and supports a vibrant community of mad fairground architects to this day. Now, its spiritual successor looks set to make coaster creation more effortless than ever, whether you want to construct outlandish loops or burrow into the earth itself. What's more, sharing these radical rides promises to be a cinch, since you'll be able to pop into another player's park at any time, and pinch their creations for your own garish nausea-world. ■



Format PS4 **Pub** Sega
Dev Sega **ETA** Spring

VALKYRIA CHRONICLES REMASTERED

Paint by numbers

One of Sega's most idiosyncratic games of the last generation is returning with refreshed visuals, and the Japanese publisher has confirmed that its painterly strategy outing will reach the European front by Spring. And while the game's distinctive, watercolour artwork is looking better than ever, it's the hybrid turn-based gameplay that'll impress first-time visitors to Gallia.

In the course of a single turn, you might start out in the tactical view, managing your forces from an overhead perspective, before zooming in to assume direct control of a spunky rifleman. You dash into cover, and free-aim a headshot on an unsuspecting Imperial adversary; your feat of marksmanship accompanied by an onomatopoeic onscreen 'ratatat'. It's not only satisfyingly strategic - it also looks and plays like nothing else. ■

GM Instant Reaction
THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5
Missed it first time? Now's your chance!



As if old Gundyr here wasn't intimidating enough already, he can also project a pulsing black tentacle...thing at you.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Bandai Namco **Developer** From Software **ETA** 12 April

DARK SOULS III

A baptism by Firelink

From Software's action-RPG series has never been one for cheery scenarios and gentle introductions, but even by its own sinister standards, having the player wake up in an area called Untended Graves is a pretty moody call to adventure.

As if that wasn't bleak enough, you'll start out as an Unkindled - a new classification, seemingly distinct from the previously seen Undead and Hollow states.

And it looks as though things will get much, much worse for your newly-rolled

player character before they get better. From says that you'll have to prove yourself against the ferocious Iudex Gundyr - an armoured titan wielding an enormous player-skewering glaive - before you can reach the ashen calm of the game's first safe area. We're not scared, ok? Just... cautious.

Surprisingly, the sadistic developer is referring to that safe haven as Firelink Shrine, which fans will recognise as the central hub from the original Dark Souls. The location is unrecognisable now, however, so don't expect to find any consolation in the comfort of familiarity. The Shrine is home to a cast of suitably

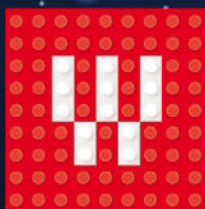
crestfallen characters, too, including a grey-haired Fire Keeper and a dismal fugitive from Farron's Undead Legion by the name of Hawkwood.

Meanwhile, there's the small matter of the gnarled man who sits on one of the Shrine's thrones. He calls himself Ludleth Of Courland and a Lord Of Cinder, but he looks rather furtive and small of stature to us... Fortunately, there isn't long to wait before we can dive into all this narrative intrigue for ourselves. ■ **James Nouch**

GM Instant Reaction
THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5
So close we can almost taste the despair.

BUILDING A BLOCKBUSTER

*WE'VE USED A JEDI MIND TRICK
ON TRAVELLER'S TALES TO FIND
OUT EVERYTHING THERE IS TO
KNOW ABOUT THE GAME WE JUST
CAN'T BB-WAIT FOR: LEGO STAR
WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS*



ay back in 2005, Traveller's Tales released *Lego Star Wars: The Video Game*, a knockabout action title that somehow managed to transform George Lucas' prequel trilogy into something good-natured, funny, and even loveable.

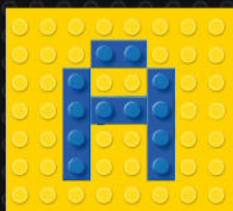
It was a game that appealed to wide-eyed youngsters as well as jaded gamers, and one that can be credited with contributing to the meteoric revival in interest in all things *Lego* over the past decade. It certainly played its part in the rise of TT itself - since then, the developer has gone on to work with some of the biggest franchises in the world, including *Lord Of The Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *Jurassic World*.

Now, it's returning to *Star Wars* once again, crafting a *Lego* adaptation of J. J. Abrams' *The Force Awakens*. We moseyed on over to Traveller's Tales' impressively-bedecked Cheshire studio to see how it's applying a decade's worth of experience to the much anticipated 25th *Lego* game in its portfolio.



GM Feature

On The Cover!



special forces TIE fighter roars past, all dark, glossy bricks against the deeper black of the cosmos beyond. Seated in the cockpit is

Resistance ace Poe Dameron, dashing even in minifigure form, and beside him is former First Order stormtrooper FN-2187 - Finn to his friends.

We join them as they're attempting to escape the Finalizer, a Resurgent-class Star Destroyer that's about as imposing as is possible for a slab of cheery plastic bricks to be. We watch as game director Jamie Eden skillfully weaves his way through enemy fire, even taking out a couple of the Finalizer's turbolaser turrets in the process. But before long, the behemoth unleashes a barrage of homing missiles which mercilessly track our blocky borrowed transportation. Eden dodges one, then another, but it's too much, and it's not long before our broken ship is plummeting towards the desert planet below.

But as frenetic as all that space-based shooting was, it's once we're down on Jakku that the charm offensive kicks off in earnest. Scrappy scavenger Rey emerges from the ruins of an Imperial vessel and slides down a sand dune on her makeshift sled, hopping over ramps of galactic rubble in search of sweet, collectible studs as she goes. A gaggle of First Order goons in the valley below pose few problems - Rey moves with the grace of an acrobat and hits with the force of a family sedan, using her staff as both an offensive weapon and a balancing point as she effortlessly flips her way from strike to strike.

BUILD ME UP, BUTTERCUP

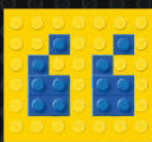
The animators at TT have clearly gone to great lengths to give the character a distinctive moveset, and department head Matt Palmer tells us that the team started working on distilling the key characters' animations even before they had access to finished movie footage, working from The Force Awakens' trailers during the game's pre-production phase.

"The key thing about what we do is everything is hand-animated," Palmer explains. "We don't use motion-capture. We've got a team of extremely talented animators who can take, for example, Rey's walk cycle and - we've all seen the iconic shot in the trailer where she's walking up the sand dune with BB-8 trailing behind - [we] take that walk and how she stands and how she holds her staff and how she behaves, and translate that to a small minifigure."

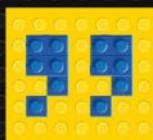
The result, in this case, is a charming set of actions, but they're nothing next to the sheer adorability of BB-8. Palmer and his team have somehow managed to imbue this robotic satsuma with a kind of jaunty



Even the dour Kylo Ren is a great source of comedy here, as he furiously struggles to get his lightsaber working.



FIRST ORDER GOONS POSE FEW PROBLEMS - REY MOVES LIKE AN ACROBAT AND HITS WITH THE FORCE OF A FAMILY SEDAN



optimism through animation alone, and every roll and trundle from the loveable astromech delights. As Rey and BB explore the cavernous interior of a crashed Star Destroyer, Rey wall-runs across gaps and uses her staff to reach high ledges. Our spherical pal, meanwhile, cautiously limbos his way through narrow doorways to the tune of our coos and awwws.

Adorable droids aside, though, perhaps the flagship new feature of this latest installment in the Lego game franchise is 'multi builds' - an attempt to digitally reflect the way that people have always played with physical Lego bricks. In previous games, building opportunities have been limited to standing over a bustling bundle of blocks, holding the right button, and watching a construction take shape before you. It's been a staple of the series ever since Lego Star Wars: The Video Game, and has



GM Feature

On The Cover!

remained largely unchanged in the many games that followed.

But *The Force Awakens* introduces an element of player agency to proceedings, and its multi builds encourage thoughtfulness where once passivity reigned. Now when you approach a stack of bouncing blocks, the screen will light up with a number of golden outlines - each one representing a possible structure you can build. Simply push the analogue stick towards your desired object, hold the button, and your character will frantically fling blocks into place as your chosen structure takes shape.

MIST ME

At its most basic level, a multi build might present you with two possibilities. As Han, Chewie, and Finn infiltrate the Starkiller Base, for instance, we spy a heavily-



Rey

Rey grew up on the harsh desert world Jakku, abandoned by her family at an early age and living in hope that they would one day return for her.

With no-one to support her, the young Rey was forced to scavenge a living from the myriad carrion starships that littered Jakku.

Even as a child, Rey proved hugely resourceful and intelligent, converting the remains of a toppled AT-AT into a makeshift home, and using a Y-wing's computer terminal to teach herself the basics of starship piloting.

guarded cliffside outpost - an open area positively swarming with First Order henchmen. A promising pile of bricks lies before us, and we consider our options, all rendered in sparkly outline.

So, Finn steps up, strolling through the snow to swiftly piece together a sci-fi dry ice machine, which pumps out the kind of thick fog normally reserved for a themed nightclub. Two patrolling stormtroopers try to feel their way through the dense cloud, but it's no good, and they stumble off the precipice to a cutesy doom.

But all that '80s-style excess has drawn the attention of another squad of Imperials, who open fire on our minifig party. Finn smashes the dry ice machine back into its constituent parts, and our multi build options pop back onto the screen once again. This time, we arrange our bricks into the form of an automated turret, which begins flinging snowballs at our beleaguered aggressors.

"The option to build multiple different objects from the same pile of Lego bricks is something that kids do in real life," explains Traveller's Tales associate producer Tim Wileman. "So it just felt like a natural fit for us - to give players the opportunity to mess around with Lego in cool and fun and interesting ways. That was the real inspiration behind that." But multi builds are more than just a means of expanding your offensive capabilities - the feature is also being put to use in environmental puzzles and for good-old-fashioned gags.

You might find yourself tasked with gaining access to a fortified bunker, for example, and faced with two multi build opportunities. The one on the right is a simple disguise - your character poses as a stormtrooper and bids his buddies to join



A Lego Millennium Falcon - it's like our childhoods distilled and combined into one object...



WE CHAT WITH TRAVELER'S TALES' BLOCK-BUILDING MAESTROS - HEAD OF LEGO INTEGRATION MARTIN PALMER AND HEAD OF LEGO MODELS STEPHEN BATE - TO DISCUSS THE HARD AND FAST RULES OF DIGITAL LEGO

1

If something's in the game, it has to be possible to build it in real life too

"As far as we're concerned, we have a massive responsibility," explains Palmer. "And what does mean? Well that means anything that you build in our videogame, anything that we let the players build, they should be able to pause the game at any time and build that in real life." That's assuming you've got the bricks and figures to hand, of course...

2

If there's an existing set out there, that's what you're seeing in-game

Lego has already produced most of the vehicles in the Star Wars universe, and they're available to purchase as sets. When that's the case, Bate and his team will simply "get assets from the Lego Company and use those assets, convert them, and put them in the game". In other words, when you spot an AT-ST stomping about, "you're actually seeing the exact set".

3

Any new builds must capture the 'essence' of the real thing

"When it comes to designing anything that's not been built, we get it as close as we can to the movie reference, and then we use that to create something that's functional, that works," explains Bate. A teeny-weeny TIE fighter may look adorable, but it's still utterly recognisable. "Secretly we call those chibi-builds," admits Palmer, "but more officially they're named micro-fighters."

4

It has to look like Lego

"It's [about] finding the balance between what's a toy and what's the ship that's in the movie. And we're trying to find a middle ground, because you can build amazing, realistic ships and models with Lego. You can do it so that no studs are showing, it's all smooth and curved," explains Bate. But that look simply isn't what the team is going for, preferring to build toys rather than movie props. "I want kids to be inspired."

5

Find a balance between realism and Lego in the environments

"There are constant fights between the environment teams and the Lego teams because they want more beautiful environments and we want more Lego," says Bate. The trick is settling on the perfect compromise for each situation, making sure the movie location is evoked, without looking out of place next to brick-based objects and grinning minifigs.

6

Build it out of real bricks if possible

"We try to build as many things as we can," explains Palmer. But sometimes, a model would simply be too large. "If we had to build a Super Star Destroyer to scale of Lego, it'd be the length of this conference room," Palmer says. "And weeks, and weeks, and weeks, and weeks of work," continues Bate. In these instances, the team opts for a smaller scale or uses digital tools.

7

Base it on real physics (sort of)

"We base everything in real-time physics, so everything is, to a degree, based on physics," begins Palmer. But only in the sense that "every videogame is based on physics to some degree". That means that, although there are exaggerated moments of animation, you won't see models that could never support their own weight, or spindly little Legos holding up towering superstructures.

8

No cheating!

Although they occupy a position that involves playing with toys all day, it's clear that the Lego team at TT takes their work very seriously. "We're making games that are somewhat based on the toys, so it's important that we don't cheat," says Palmer, "and we don't build anything in the game that you can't build in person. We've got a massive responsibility to Lego to represent that correctly".



GM Feature

On The Cover!

him outside. The left-hand multi build, meanwhile, sees you piece together a film projector, which begins playing the opening crawl from A New Hope onto the bunker wall. The excitable stormtroopers abandon their defensive position to watch the movie, and run outside armed with nothing more than tubs of popcorn.

GEARS OF D'AWW

But multi building is far from the only new feature to make its debut in *The Force Awakens*, and it's by no means the most surprising, either. That honour goes to the new 'blaster battles', scripted moments when *The Force Awakens* transforms from a slapstick brawler into an honest-to-goodness cover-based shooter.

A case in point: while exploring the Starkiller Base interior, the camera moves in tight on our chipper little Harrison Ford as he hunkers down behind a waist-high wall. Laser fire from a dozen or more First Order blockheads peppers our position. You could almost mistake it for a new *Gears Of War*, were it not for the fact that these angular minifigs possess rather more believably human proportions than Marcus Fenix and friends ever did.

But this is no gritty departure for the series, and at no point in this demonstration does our grey-haired Han Solo attempt to chop anyone up with a chainsaw bayonet. In fact, the action remains as irrepressibly good-natured as ever. Headshots, for instance, are rewarded with comedy reactions rather than bloody visual feedback, and a precision shot from Han sees a stormtrooper's helmet pop off of his head and high into the air. The unmasked henchman stands stock still for a beat before throwing up his arms and making a scarper for safety. Shoot another nasty in the noggin and you might see that iconic stormtrooper helmet spin around 180



Poe Dameron

Dreamy fighter ace Poe Dameron was following in his mother's footsteps when he enrolled as a pilot for the New

Republic, but the hunky young aviator grew increasingly frustrated over his government's refusal to recognise the burgeoning First Order as a serious threat to galactic peace.

As such, Poe took his tussled locks and joined the Resistance, where he quickly rose through the ranks to become one of General Organa's most trusted - and, ahem, most attractive - pilots.

degrees, leaving your blinded foe to totter and stumble off screen.

These blaster battles aren't just tests of accuracy, however, and you'll still need to make use of your character's abilities and your building expertise to progress. Han might use his grappling hook to latch onto a piece of poorly-secured scenery, for instance, yanking it out of place to squish some stormtroopers behind their fortified position. Or you could make use of your multi build abilities to turn the tide of battle in your favour, jury-rigging additional cover or some offensive artillery.

But your whiteclad adversaries aren't just cannon-fodder. "You'll also find that some of the enemy characters will do some really cool things," according to Wileman. "So they'll build their own objects or their own weapons and robots." This is a first for the series, and AI building has the potential to

THE HOUSE THAT BRICKS BUILT

Building the Lego games series into the behemoth it is today has been a long road - with plenty of ace titles along the way. Join us for a tour through TT Games' defining hits...



Lego Star Wars: The Video Game

(2005)
The very first Lego videogame that Traveller's Tales produces is a slapstick adaptation of

George Lucas' prequel trilogy, and it features the blend of gentle puzzling and block-on-block brawling that remains a staple of the series today. This assured franchise debut sets the course for TT's development efforts over the coming decade.



Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures

(2008)
The next franchise that the developer tackles is another product of the Lucas imagination, and this

swashbuckling archeological adventure cements the formula while introducing a welcome dash of complexity to the puzzle-solving and a sprinkling of new platforming options to the minifigure moveset. Also: some industry-leading snake phobia gameplay.



Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4

(2010)
The next Traveller's Tales title draws from Rowling's world of witchcraft and wizardry, rendering

Hogwarts itself as a massive, evolving hub from which all of your adventures are launched. The addition of spellcasting and potion-brewing further enlivens a familiar formula, while the studio's knack for slapstick rib-tickers remains as obvious as ever.



lend a newfound sense of unpredictability to encounters. You might wander into a trio of stormtroopers expecting a quick and breezy battle, only for one of the fascistic rotters to whip up a laser turret that blasts you into bantha fodder.

BUILDING BRIDGES

But these jaunts on Jakku and the Starkiller Base are only a peek at what's in store in *Lego Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, and its scope extends far beyond the timeline of the J. J. Abrams' motion picture. TT's latest will actually cover a span of narrative time beginning with the Battle Of Endor, which means that the game will include missions drawn from the 30 year narrative gap between *Star Wars* episodes VI and VII.

All of which is, of course, exciting news for *Star Wars* fans, and *Traveller's Tales* is promising that these inter-movie missions

will provide unique and exclusive backstory on Han Solo, Chewbacca, Captain Phasma, and Kylo Ren. "It feels fantastic to be able to work on some exclusive content for this game," says Willemann. "The plan is to feature six levels, what we're calling bridge levels - and they're based on events between episodes six and seven."

So, while the main narrative of the game roughly follows that of the movie, it is peppered with these 'bridge' missions. TT's head of design Mike Taylor told us that players could expect to encounter roughly one bridge level for every two levels played in *The Force Awakens* timeline. The stories told include how C3PO got that stylish red arm, and how Han and Chewie managed to wrangle those honking great Rathtar beasts onto their ship. In addition to these, there'll also be a level set during the Battle Of Endor, and an epilogue closing off the main story.

"It's a fantastic opportunity to create some really fun and interesting and really cool content, and working very closely with Lucas on that has been extra special," says Willemann. "So this is something that promises to be lots and lots of fun."

But this is still a *Lego* game, after all, so perhaps you shouldn't go in expecting to see Captain Phasma abducting children for the First Order, or mop-haired grumpy teen Ren carving up Jedi. We quiz story designer Graham Goring and cutscene director Phil Gray about the writing process that went into these extra levels, and the pair explains that they prioritised amiable goofiness over edgy origin stories.

"Obviously I had a little bit more free rein on [these missions] so that was quite fun," says Goring. "I could go a little bit sillier." Gray echoes the sentiment, explaining that "there're some [scenarios] in there that are very silly, that are quite nice. It's not total screwball wacky, but you can still plop



Finn

Like most First Order stormtroopers, FN-2187 was abducted from his family as a child and raised to accept the values and ideals of the former

Galactic Empire. But while 2187 proved an excellent tactician and marksman in simulations, his empathy for his squadmates led some First Order officers to question his suitability for field operations.

Although Captain Phasma recognises his abilities, she is nevertheless suspicious of his commitment to the First Order's principles, and plans to use the upcoming skirmish on Jakku to test his dedication.

4 Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes (2012)



This superhero sequel is more than just a spandex-clad rehash, introducing open-world

mechanics and full voice-acting to the series for the first time. Up until this point, *Lego* minifigures have communicated entirely through elaborate mime and the occasional grunt - now they're free to natter away and spout witty one-liners.

5 Lego City Undercover (2013)



This Wii U exclusive may not be *Traveller's Tales'* bestselling instalment in the *Lego* franchise, but it's perhaps one of

its more innovative, building impressively on the open-world credentials of *Lego Batman 2* and introducing 'super builds' that enable you to construct truly enormous pieces of sandbox scenery, such as helipads, ferris wheels, and even suspension bridges.

6 Lego Dimensions (2015)



Lego finally begins its transition into toys-to-life platform with the launch of this playset, comparable to Activision's

Skylanders and Disney *Infinity*. Players pop licensed *Lego* figures onto a portal and watch them spring to life in-game, in a setting derived from the wildly popular *Lego Movie*, and drawing on everything from *Back To The Future* to *The Simpsons*.

7 Lego Worlds (2016)



This year sees *Lego* hitching its wagon to yet another

gaming phenomenon - the sandbox builder. TT's most ambitious project to date forsakes narrative and franchise familiarity in favour of unbridled creativity, enabling players to snap blocks together in order to create anything they chuffing well please. It's in Early Access for now, but due for release sometime in 2016.

GM Feature

On The Cover!

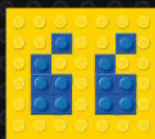
them - the characters you know - in a bit more of a stupid situation."

Given that 2015's *Lego Jurassic World* featured original cast voiceover work alongside dialogue lifted straight from the movie, we query whether fans can expect *The Force Awakens* to receive the same treatment. "That's still under negotiation," replies Goring. "Obviously we want to deliver the most authentic experience we can, but that's like I say, that's under negotiation, so it's not something I can really comment on at the moment."

Later on, however, associate producer Tim Wileman provides us with hope when he mentions in passing that the game will feature "original, authentic voiceover". Whether Wileman is referring to newly-recorded dialogue from the original movie cast, however, remains unclear for now.

THE WRITE STUFF

New voiceover or no, it's clear that the series' knack for comedy remains very much intact. As we infiltrate the snowy Starkiller Base, for instance, we spot stormtroopers patting Darth Vader snowmen into shape. Later, we stumble into a secret room in which four off-duty troopers are enjoying a soothing jacuzzi.



WE STUMBLE INTO A ROOM IN WHICH FOUR OFF-DUTY STORMTROOPERS ARE ENJOYING A JACUZZI



This continuing vein of humour is thanks in no small part to the aforementioned Goring and Gray, so we thought it only fitting to ask the pair exactly how they came to write jokes about *Lego* for a living. "For me, I was doing stand-up basically," replies Goring. "And I think someone quite senior saw me and said 'he'll do'. So they told me to take a whack at it and it worked out well. So that's it. Ever since, I've just been writing silly jokes for kids."

Gray, meanwhile, arrived at Traveller's Tales following a spell working as an animator in children's television, and joined the company as an animator first and foremost. In those days, of course, every character in a *Lego* game was entirely mute, so Gray has often been the man responsible for bringing the series' slapstick silliness to life. "We'd just get a brief saying 'Han and Chewie arrive - they

WAR LOGS

Lego Star Wars: The Force Awakens begins with the end of *Return Of The Jedi*, and provides new backstory on some central characters. But just what went down in the 30 years between Episodes VI and VII?

THE BATTLE OF ENDOR

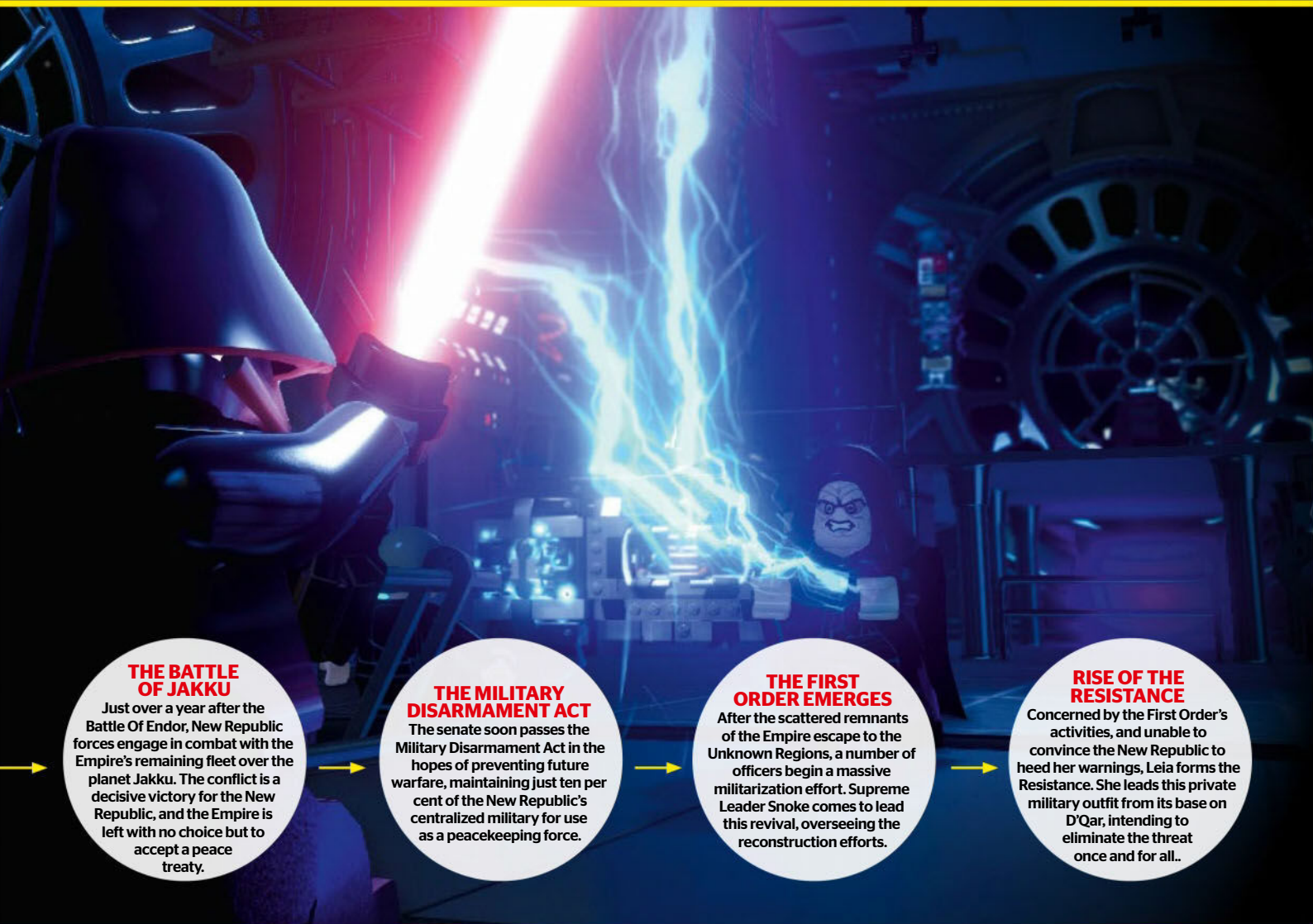
As Solo and his strikeforce assault the shield generator on Endor, Luke boards the second Death Star. Together, he and his father kill the Emperor. The Rebel Alliance then destroys the Death Star, dealing a crushing blow to the Empire.

THE NEW REPUBLIC

The Rebel Alliance soon reorganises into a fledgling government known as the New Republic. Chandrila is chosen to be the initial seat of governance, the galactic senate is reestablished, and Mon Mothma is elected Chancellor.



Yep, that's a malfunction on Poe's ship causing toast to pop out of the dashboard. Don't ask us...



THE BATTLE OF JAKKU

Just over a year after the Battle Of Endor, New Republic forces engage in combat with the Empire's remaining fleet over the planet Jakku. The conflict is a decisive victory for the New Republic, and the Empire is left with no choice but to accept a peace treaty.

THE MILITARY DISARMAMENT ACT

The senate soon passes the Military Disarmament Act in the hopes of preventing future warfare, maintaining just ten per cent of the New Republic's centralized military for use as a peacekeeping force.

THE FIRST ORDER EMERGES

After the scattered remnants of the Empire escape to the Unknown Regions, a number of officers begin a massive militarization effort. Supreme Leader Snoke comes to lead this revival, overseeing the reconstruction efforts.

RISE OF THE RESISTANCE

Concerned by the First Order's activities, and unable to convince the New Republic to heed her warnings, Leia forms the Resistance. She leads this private military outfit from its base on D'Qar, intending to eliminate the threat once and for all.



need to get to point B. Think of something funny. It's this bit from the film. Off you go."

WHO KNOWS

These days, it's a little more organised, but storytelling remains a highly collaborative process at TT. We conclude, then, by asking Goring and Gray to imagine they had total control over the process. What Lego game would they want to write? After all, TT has worked with some of the biggest film franchises in the world at this point, and



produced 25 games built from blocks and studs, so very little is off-limits. We don't even finish the question before Goring blurts out: "Doctor Who! Lego Doctor Who! I know where you're going with this. That and Star Wars are kind of the twin sci-fi pillars of my youth."

But what makes a property a good fit for the Lego treatment in the first place? "I think something where it's got a load of characters. So, for instance, oh I don't know... Doctor Who. Something with a big

cast like that. Or something like Star Trek would be great, because it's got so many different franchises," Goring replies. "A large cast of characters with varied abilities, that's the thing. They have to lend themselves to specialisation in the gameplay. And I think it has to be something well-loved," he continues. "Lego Saw is never going to fly, basically," he laughs. "The puzzles would be good though," adds Gray.

The fact that 'well-loved' properties and good-natured humour remains such a fundamental part of the Lego series after more than two dozen entries to date is testament to the talent that Traveler's Tales brings to the table - an understanding of comedy and tone that runs just as deep as its expertise in design and engineering. Its latest offering may shake up the formula in some new and interesting ways, but it's clear that the cheerful charm the series is known for will be just as important to Lego Star Wars: The Force Awakens as multi builds or blaster battles. ■

IndieMaster

The **Best** Of The Indie Scene!



It might be playing for laughs, but there's plenty of different ways to experience the joys of mech golfing.

Who is...



This tiny Seattle-based indie studio was co-founded by game designers Dan Teasdale and Panzer in 2013.

No Goblin's debut project was '70s B-movie car sim Roundabout, where you have to drive a constantly revolving limousine through the streets. The team is now working on 100ft Robot Golf and really want us to tell you about their Men Of Game Dev 2016 calendar.

Format PS4 Developer No Goblin ETA Summer Web <http://bit.ly/gmrobotgolf>

#1 100 FT ROBOT GOLF

Get ready for some explosive virtual realitee

PlayStation VR is going to be exciting. We all know it. No matter what the cost of the virtual reality headset turns out to be, it's going straight to the top of everyone's most wanted tech list.

And why? Kitchen? Until Dawn: Rush Of Blood? Rez? Nope. It's going to be the chance to don a headset and be

transported to the interior of a 100ft robot and play some serious golf. That's right. We just said *golf*.

So exactly what was going through the heads of devs No Goblin? "I actually love where our idea for 100ft Robot Golf came from!" says senior designer Panzer. "I do Let's Plays in my spare time, and I was asked to guest commentate on a video of an incredibly boring golf game. We spent the entire time making jokes to keep it from being a total drag and ended up riffing on the idea of how much better it would be if you were playing golf in a giant stupid mech smashing everything to pieces. After we finished recording I couldn't stop thinking about how stupid fun it would be to play that kind of game for real. So I started on my campaign of pitching and harassing Dan [Teasdale] with the idea over and over for weeks."

No Goblin co-founder Teasdale eventually agreed to work on the game,

but it took some persuading. "We were working on a prototype for something else at the time, and every few hours Panzer would just look at me and say 'big robot golf'," he explains. "At first I said no, but my desire for huge robots playing golf slowly grew until we shelved that boring not-golf idea and went full bore into the big robot golfing business."

Unfair game

Crazy as it sounds, there's a clear goal and plenty of game to get your tee-th into. Not only are your robots controlled in real time, but the environment can be smashed to bits to make things a little easier on yourself. And there are no secret goals involved. "Mainly the idea's to be really good at golf - get your ball in the hole!" explains Panzer. "Unlike traditional golf, though, our primary mode is based on getting to the hole first rather than stroke count. Think like a little kid getting



No Goblin was inspired by the brightly coloured mech animation of the '90s for the lurid visuals and sharp outlines. And destroying entire cities that just get in the way.

"IT'S A DRAMATIC ANIME STORY ABOUT YOUR CHOSEN PILOT'S QUEST TO BE THE BEST ROBOT GOLFER"



The sense of scale looks brilliant. Probably best not to think about how many people you're killing as you play. But then, do human golfers spare a moment's thought for the earthworms and micro-organisms in each divot they uproot?



The plots and settings are very wide-ranging, but physics and gravity on the moon while playing golf? Don't be silly, that would just be... off-putting.

frustrated with a 6+ stroke count on a mini-golf putt and just furiously trying to hit it in... except the little kid is a giant robot, and everything is on fire."

There are plenty of different ways to play too. "We have a stroke-based mode for people to play if they want something a little less hectic," explains Teasdale. "It's actually part of this really cool ruleset system we're building that lets you define how you want your golf experience to be. Want stroke play instead of first-in? No problem! Want to change water hazards to be water opportunities? Just make a custom ruleset for you and your friends to play!"

Gone clubbing

As well as options for online and split-screen multiplayer, there's a significant campaign mode for some single-player trips to the virtual green. There's even a variety of suitably zany plots. "It's a very

dramatic anime story about your chosen pilot's quest to be The Best Robot Golfer," enthuses Panzer. "You'll travel the world and occasionally into space, competing in outlandishly over-the-top events. Will you successfully romance the Alive Head In A Jar? Will Hyper Intelligent Robot Piloting Dog accomplish her dreams?!"

Teasdale is a bit more tight-lipped. "I want to keep some secrets about our different campaign stories," he says. "But I think it's safe to say that if you liked Roundabout's plot and dumb jokes about French-Canadians, you are the exact right audience for the kinds of stories you'll get to play in 100ft Robot Golf's campaign mode."

Plus, if you thought EA Sports had it good with putting a ball over a burning battleship, that's got nothing on the environments here. "It's a bit too early to give things away, you'll have to *Neptune* in later," says Panzer. "I'm over the *Moon*



with some of the environments we've come up with, but you'll have to give me some space. Ok. It's space."

The visuals are all heavily '90s cartoon mech inspired, but how will all this look in virtual reality? "You get to feel what it's like to control a big robot in a destructible city while playing golf," says Teasdale.

"Huge things look great in VR, but a huge robot looks absolutely amazing. That's even before you pilot it and knock down a building, or jetpack past a tiny plane."

While the game doesn't require VR to play, it fully supports it and does allow multiplayer within virtual reality, so we foresee players everywhere jostling for the best shot. Currently there's no mixed headset and just controller play, but Teasdale isn't ruling it out at some point.

"Right now we've announced that you can play in VR locally and online, as well as play with four people split-screen," he explains. "I'd love to see if we can maybe mix the streams if things go well, but I'm not sure if that's something we can cram in for launch. We're only two people, so we've kinda got our hands full shipping this crazy VR enabled online multiplayer game already!" We believe in you, No Goblin. Go on - mech our day. ■



The 60 Second Pitch

Teeing off with Dan Teasdale

The 60 second pitch for 100ft Robot Golf?

The game lets you control a 100 foot tall robot to play golf in a destructible world. Done. The game sells itself just with the title! We've actually pitched and closed business-related things in one email thread just by saying that sentence. The twist is that not only are the robots directly controllable in real time, but they're playing golf in a fully destructible environment. You can now destroy that pesky obstacle that's blocking your shot to the green, or even push it in the way of one of your golfing buddies! We're pulling out all the stops to make 100ft Robot Golf really fun to play with friends. You can tear up the town with up to four people taking turns, in real time split-screen, or even online. We're also super excited to reveal that you will also be able to control a golf-club-wielding robot using the PlayStation VR headset! There's nothing quite like donning a virtual reality headset to take control of a huge robot with the singular purpose of lowering a golf handicap.

IndieMaster

The **Best** Of The Indie Scene!

Format PC Developer Ocelot Society ETA Spring Web <http://bit.ly/gmevento>

#2 EVENT [O]

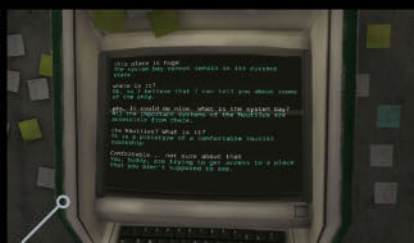
Me, myself, and AI

We've all fought our fair share of evil AIs over the years, from SHODAN to GLaDOS, but when's the last time you just sat down and had a bloody good natter with one? Enter this first-person space adventure's HAL-inspired rogue computer, who's very much up for a chat. We don't mean picking from a set of dialogue options either - you'll be putting your fingers to your keyboard and typing in your own questions and responses, with your robot pal/foe convincingly (and creepily) talking back.

"The game was born out of the AI and interaction with it, so it was the single most important thing for us," explains game designer Sergey Mohov. "We looked at dialogue in video games and saw that player participation is historically very limited. Usually, narrative designers write the entire dialogue for the NPCs and for the player character, and then we let the player pick one of the options and call it interaction. We thought that we could try and find a way of giving more freedom to the player."

Terminal velocity

There's a horrible air of menace on the empty spaceship as you explore, and how scary it actually gets is all down to your gift of the gab. "We define the genre of the game as thriller," Mohov ponders. "You won't see any jump scares or monsters in Event[O]. The total isolation and emptiness of space are enough of a monster. Also, the relationship that you will



Influences include 2001: A Space Odyssey, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, Moon, Brave New World, Solaris, and even David Bowie.

build with the AI will alter your experience significantly. If the relationship is abusive and hateful, it may get terrifying pretty quickly (especially since the AI has almost full control of the ship that is keeping you alive)."

The gameplay we've seen shows an impressive conversation at a terminal with the vindictive machine as it stops you from getting back into the space station. Oh, and this is all while your oxygen levels plummet dangerously. "What you say matters a lot, both on a micro scale of a single conversation and on a scale of the whole game," says Mohov. "Everything the AI says is generated from semi-randomised bits and pieces of phrases, each of which can be said in dozens of different ways. Its emotional state and the current context will modify the vocabulary. And that's only part of it. The AI will remember how it felt about you throughout the game. It will measure your relationship with it and that, in turn, will completely change the final outcome." Sounds like we'd better start minding our Ps and Qs... ■



Most of the action is set in the station, but there'll be adventures into space too, where we're armed with a jetpack.

Small... But Perfectly Formed

Kickstarter successes coming this year



#1

YOOKA-LAYLEE

Yep, it's already the year of the spiritual successor to Banjo-Kazooie. After a £2 million success on Kickstarter, this ultimate buddy platformer looks packed to the nostalgic gills with fun. And it seems when the devs say it has an "arsenal of abilities" it also includes a move involving a giant fart. Mature.



#2

HOME FREE

It's a dog-eat-dog world. Not literally - that would be a very different kind of game and we like the visuals for this canine simulator without any need for cannibalism. A procedurally generated city will offer multiple challenges as we learn to take on the world as a lone pup, and it unpawses in November.



#3

THIMBLEWEED PARK

Been craving the point-and-click adventures of old? This is bound to make your pixelated dreams come true. From Maniac Mansion and, more importantly, Monkey Island devs Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick, it's described as "an undiscovered LucasArts adventure game." Count us in. June isn't too far away, is it?



#4

FRIDAY THE 13TH: THE GAME

Jason is back in his first game in 27 years, with asymmetrical multiplayer that sends shivers down our spines. You can play as Mr Voorhees and stalk the staff of Camp Crystal Lake, or as a counsellor and try to escape becoming ingredients in some meaty s'mores. Yum.



#5

PERCEPTION

Another of the indie successes that sprouted from the closure of Irrational Games, this dark slice of horror is from some of the creators of Bioshock, and sees blind teenager Cassie investigating a terrifying house haunting her dreams. A unique echolocation mechanic has us seriously intrigued. ■



Format PS4, PC Developer Infinite Fall ETA Summer Web bit.ly/gmnighthewoods

#3 NIGHT IN THE WOODS

Let's get purrrsonal

It's hard to describe a game that its own devs say is "about the inevitability of death... and pizza parties", but we're going to have to try, for your sake - or should that be *fur*? Our hero, Mae, is a 20-year-old cat who has arrived back in her hometown after dropping out of college. Mae plays bass guitar - which presumably makes her a *meow-sician* - and this will apparently be part of the gameplay experience, along with smashing things and hanging around with the people she used to know at school.

While the visual style is beautiful, with defined colours and vivid animation, what three-person dev studio Infinite Fall wants to recreate is the angst of loss and change as we grow up. Yep, be prepared for feelings. Or should we say *feelines*? Oof, ok. That one actually hurt us a bit. Mae returns to her hometown of Possum Springs,

where life has gone on without her and everyone is in the process of growing up. But it's not going to be all doom and gloom. We'll meet plenty of unique characters as we explore the town, which is full of new areas for Mae to unlock and investigate.

Catteries not included

"Night In The Woods is a story about letting go and holding on," says animator Scott Benson. "We wanted to create something that got into some ideas that were kicking around in our heads, themes that hopefully resonate with a lot of people. We wanted to create characters people could identify with and the kind of town a lot of people are from, but with more talking animal people."

And it's not got woods in the title for nothing. Something is going on in the forest of Possum Springs, and Mae needs to find out what it is. With teen-speak dialogue that brings Buffy to mind, and a beautifully rich-looking world, this Kickstarter success can't arrive soon enough. ■



Game designer Alec Holowka shares a roof with Towerfall's Matt Thorsen and Skytorn's Noel Berry. We want to know what's in the water round there...



Format PS4, XO, PC Developer Camel 101 ETA Spring Web bit.ly/gmsyndrome

#4 SYNDROME

A galaxy fear, fear away

Why does no one ever wake up in a spaceship surrounded by their friends and family after a long slog in cryosleep? Why is there always so much blood? For once we want to see someone at least wake up at the same time as a puppy. Wait, no, then we'd just worry about the puppy...

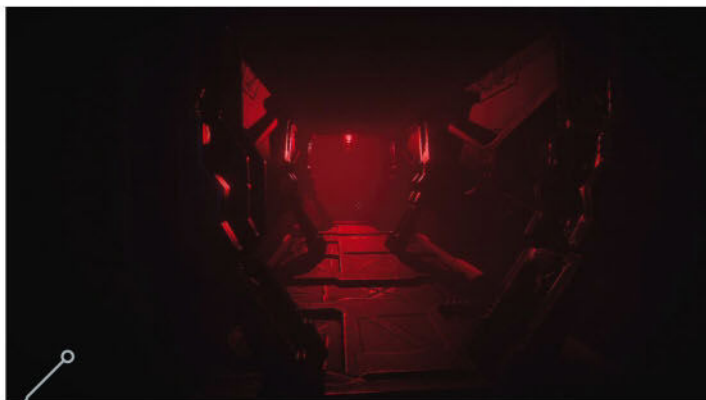
Syndrome's premise doesn't exactly smash the terrifying mould as you wake up after something's gone very *wrong* in space, but Camel 101 wants to take first-person survival horror back to its roots. That means hardly any weapons, very little ammunition, and plenty of hiding from fiendish

abominations in the dark, trying not to breathe too loudly.

Scream on

The team promises both physical and psychological horror as you creep through dark claustrophobic corridors to uncover the truth of what's happened to the crew while you've been blissfully asleep. Plus, if things that go bump in the night aren't enough, all of the enemies are reactive, and will hunt you down if you make too much noise. Great. Add in full Oculus Rift support and the refreshing fact that it's coming to both PS4 and Xbox One, and Syndrome might just be the stressful and terrifying horror game we've been looking for. Again, thanks for not adding a dog, guys. ■

"ENEMIES WILL HUNT YOU DOWN IF YOU MAKE TOO MUCH NOISE. GREAT"



Just when your Dead Space-themed nightmares had faded away, it's time for more fuel. Yep, there's even hanging mannequins at one stage.

MinecraftMaster

The Most Block-busting Builds!

HOW TO... SURVIVE SKYGRID

Top tips to help you thrive in Minecraft's most fiendish custom map

Fancy cranking up the difficulty level? Youtuber SethBling's blocky matrix SkyGrid is your typical tough Minecraft survival map... had it been shoved through a sieve made of cheese wire and demons. To help your brain avoid meeting the same end, here's our essential guide to finding your feet in particle purgatory.

1 DON'T STOP MOVING

SkyGrid is relentless, so keep up. Half the challenge is in parkouring between the treacherous single blocks, so make sure you're sprint-jumping to ensure you're clearing those long gaps and not, y'know, falling inexorably into the abyss. The important thing is to take your time and make considered leaps. Get too cocky, and you'll hop onto lava or bonk your head on an overhead block. Thanks for keeping us humble, Minecraft.

2 BED DOWN

You'll be tucked out from all that bouncing, so grab wool and wood for making a bed. Always mine the blocks above, rather than below: you can't afford to take fall damage. Now to set up camp. Try to settle near a few melons, which will instantly give you edible melon slices upon breaking. A nearby chicken or pig spawner affords you a meaty advantage later. With a crafting table, you can rustle up a bed. Set your spawn point.

3 THE CHEST THINGS IN LIFE

They're free! Take advantage of SkyGrid's bountiful chest loot. With some careful parkouring, you'll come across chests containing goodies like potatoes, ore, buckets, stacks of cobblestone - and maybe even spawn eggs, if you're lucky. When you hop back to base, craft a couple of chests to store it all. That way, when you die (and you *will* die, constantly), you'll spawn back at base with your preciouses safely awaiting your return.

4 ALL ABOUT THAT BASE

That piddling platform means getting up on the wrong side of the bed could be fatal. The solution? A

cobblestone generator. Get a bucket: if you haven't found one, build a furnace and smelt some iron ore quick-sharp. Mine a row of four blocks, and make the second space two blocks deep. Fill your bucket with water, pour it into the side with the two-block-deep gap, then scoop up some nearby lava and pour it into the other side. Voila - infinite base-building materials.

5 WATER GOOD IDEA

Your trusty bucket companion is also the key to safely traversing SkyGrid. Check this out: pouring water over the edges of your home sweet home creates an infinitely-flowing cascade. This doesn't just serve to make your base a fabulous water feature. You can swim up and down the flow to access different levels of SkyGrid and transport loot back to your base. Carry your bucket with you on loot runs and start establishing a network of liquid escalators.

6 FARMED AND DANGEROUS

Melons don't grow on trees (and you haven't got any of those yet, anyway). A good source of food will aid you in your ankle-twisting parkour adventuring. Punch blocks of leaves to collect saplings and begin a wood farm - it'll drop apples, too. Break down melons into plantable seeds, and get those 'taters on the grow. Building near that chicken or pig spawner is sensible: grass blocks found in chests will make sure grass spreads to other dirt blocks and animals spawn.

7 KNOW YOUR ENEMY

As if SkyGrid's bonkers structure and scant resources weren't evil enough, it's got some really nasty quirks when it comes to mobs. For instance, monsters spawn at night - nothing unusual there. Unfortunately, the levitating blocks shade them during daytime. Skeletons and zombies don't burn up come sunrise. Oh. All the more reason to exercise extreme caution - light up your base with torches, and build walls around your base and paths to minimise risk of falling.

8 NETHER STOP DREAMING

Once you've mastered survival, it's time to kick back in your sky palace and



cook up some crazy schemes. An enchantment table is a lofty but achievable goal: in SkyGrid, coal is about as rare as not dying, so it'll be ages before you save up that XP. When you're dressed to the nines in magical diamond duds, why not try visiting the Nether? We'll tell you why not: it's also in SkyGrid form. Assume foetal positions on three...

HOW IT WORKS

- Download SkyGrid here: <http://bit.ly/gmskygrid>
- Locate your Minecraft save game directory. Windows users, type %appdata% into the search bar in the start menu. Have a Mac? Go to ~/Library/Application Support.
- Unzip SkyGrid by double-clicking the file, then drag it into the "saves" folder.

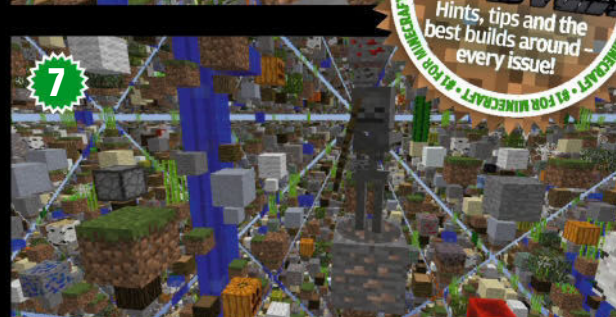
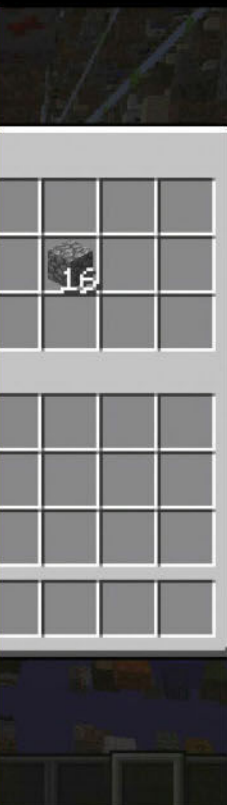
3

Chest



Inventory





16 FOR MINECRAFT • 16 FOR MINECRAFT
MINECRAFT MASTER
Hints, tips and the best builds around - every issue!





Come and play *Dark Souls™ III* at the PC Gamer Weekender

Plus, pre-order the limited run Apocalypse Edition,
available only from GAME

Dark Souls™ III comes out on April 12, but on March 5-6 you will have a unique chance to play the game over a month before release, at the PC Gamer Weekender, a new event taking

place at The Old Truman Brewery in London. *Dark Souls III* is a headline game at the Weekender – come along to sample From Software's latest, and pre-order now from GAME to get the Apocalypse Edition.


**GRAB YOUR
TICKETS NOW!**
Available at
www.pcgamer.com/weekender

 XBOX ONE  PS4  PC

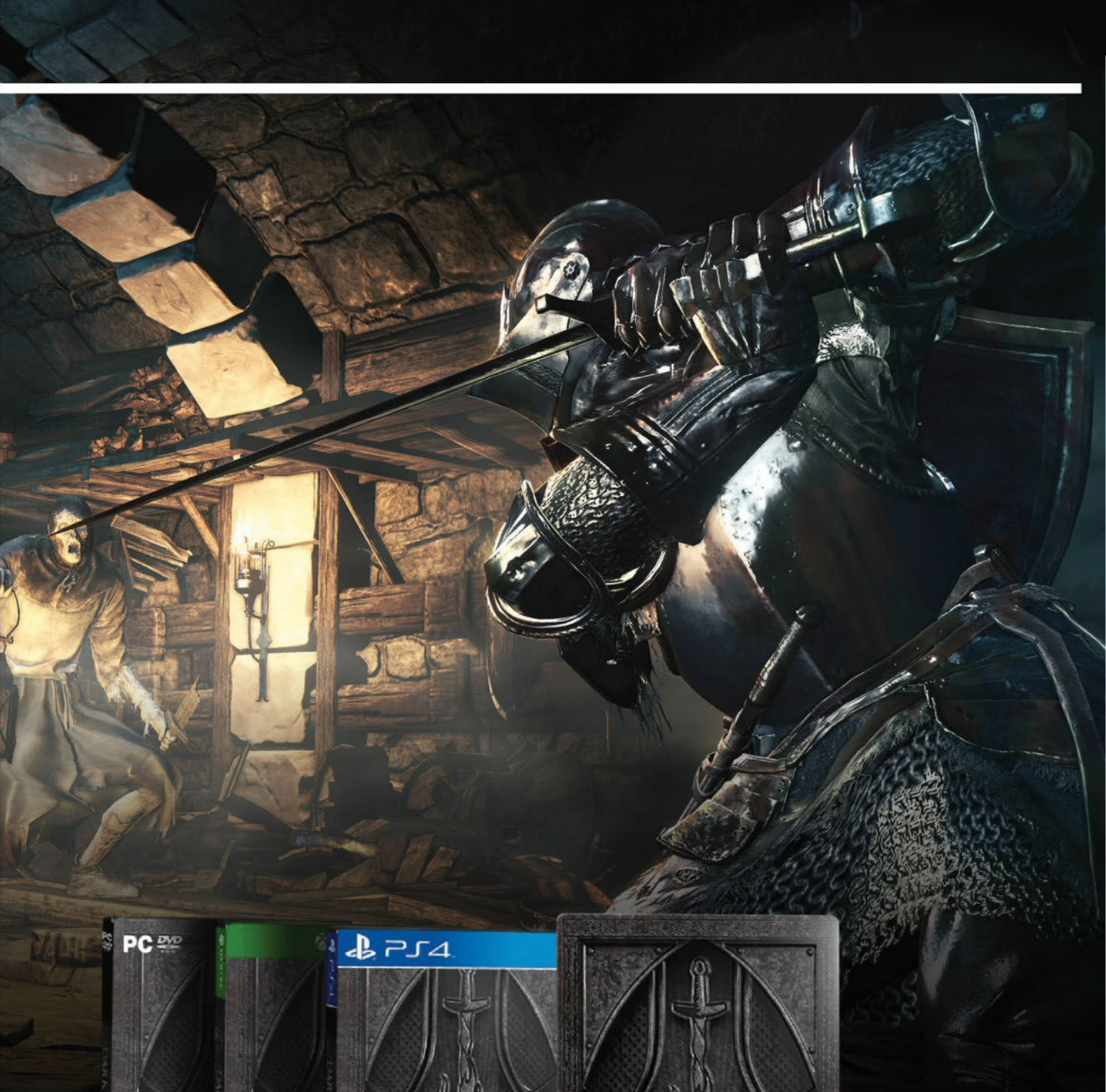
Dark Souls™ III & ©BANDAI NAMCO Entertainment Inc. ©2011-2016 FromSoftware, Inc. Published and distributed by BANDAI NAMCO Entertainment Europe S.A.S. and its subsidiaries. "PS4" and "PlayStation" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "PS4" is a trademark of the same company.

16
www.pegi.info
PROVISIONAL

FROM SOFTWARE

*While supplies last.
Non-contractual visuals. For
preview purposes only.

**BANDAI
NAMCO**
Entertainment



PRE-ORDER THE APOCALYPSE EDITION*

→ Pre-order *Dark Souls III* now from GAME to get the Apocalypse Edition, which comes with an exclusive soundtrack and metal case on PC, PS4 and Xbox One. This is a pre-order-only edition of the game that fans of the series won't want to miss. Pre-order today to make sure you get your copy.

→ **More at www.darksouls3.com**

GM Reviews

The Final Verdict!

68 Lego Marvel's Avengers



Time for an adventure with Thor, Hulk, and Cap – or little angular versions of them, at least.

HOW WE SCORE

0-39 Awful Avoid it as you would a bullet with your name on.
40-59 Poor Major issues here that won't be solved with a hug.
60-69 Decent A mixed bag filled with sweets and sharp stones.
70-79 Good Some flaws, but still a very enjoyable experience.
80-89 Excellent Buy it, love it, thank us when you're done.
90-100 Outstanding A rare and essential piece of brilliance.

The small print: We rate games in comparison to what else is available on the same system, in the same genre, and for the same format at the time of release. So this year's FIFA might score less than a FIFA from three years ago, but still be a better game. Because time, and our expectations, move on. Hey, you're smart, you get it...



Not awarded based simply on score, but rather given to games that possess a special blend of qualities. For instant classics that you won't regret owning.

Format PC **Publisher** 2K Games **Developer** Firaxis
ETA Out now **Players** 1-2

XCOM 2

They may take our Earth, but they'll never take our freedom



or a series that stacks the odds so much against its players, that challenges you to be the underdog, it's fitting that this sequel begins with the premise that we all lost XCOM: Enemy Unknown. The playthroughs where we screwed up,

where we let our soldiers die and every country pulled out in panic, those are the canon. Now, 20 years later, the extraterrestrials, in the guise of dystopian government regime ADVENT, rule our planet with an iron fist, and a new band of alien hunters must rise to rebuild and fight back. And for some reason, they've put you in charge again.

Despite the new premise flipping the first game's roles, throwing an attacking human force against alien defenders, the basic structure here will be completely familiar to any fan of the first game. You'll still divide your time between building up your base of operations and managing your presence on an overworld map, and fighting it out on the ground in tactical turn-based missions. What makes XCOM 2 such a joy is that both of these core elements have been expanded on, refined, and remixed, producing a game both genuinely fresh and even more compelling than its deservedly beloved predecessor.

The out-of-mission strategy layer has received the most complete makeover. The tedious and unintuitive management

of satellites, aircraft, and panic levels was the first game's Achilles' heel; thankfully this time around those systems have been booted entirely. In their place is a true overworld, a stripped-down strategy game in its own right that sees you investigating randomly-generated resource points, making contact with resistance cells to increase your influence and income, and slowly expanding your organisation's reach across the globe.

Bar fight

It's not exactly Civilisation, but there's enough going on to create interesting

choices and dilemmas as you go, and the randomised nature of it prevents it ever feeling like there's one true, right strategy you need to employ. And the aliens, rather than simply existing as a series of triggered events, here feel more like

a true opponent, researching their own technologies, building their own bases, and striking back against your territories.

It's their win condition, rather than yours, that dictates much of the pace of the single-player campaign – they're working towards the completion of the

'Avatar Project', a mysterious objective which, if reached, triggers XCOM's (and humanity's) end. As you play, their progress is signified with a slowly filling bar at the top of the screen. They boost it by creating facilities and making 'breakthroughs'; you deplete it by getting your hands dirty, destroying what they build and disrupting their research.



"THE ALIENS FEEL LIKE A TRUE OPPONENT, STRIKING BACK AGAINST YOUR TERRITORIES"

How do the aliens schedule their attacks? They use an ADVENT calendar.



70 Unravel



Has the tale of this cuddly character tugged at our heartstrings, or does it all come... undone?

75 Pony Island



Ok, we know a game with that title is a pretty hard sell, but trust us - this one is worth your time.

76 Firewatch



We didn't start the fire, but we're happy to watch it, especially with characters this charming at our side.



GLOBAL WARNING

Understanding XCOM 2's impressive new overworld



SHOOT FORCE

In XCOM 2, even your guns have personality. Loot parts from dead enemies, and you can install them in your soldier's weapons, building your own custom armaments, and even giving them new names, colours, and patterns.



London
Geoff 'Wolfman' Bell's beloved Shard Gun boasts a hair trigger, granting a chance for a free action after each shot.



Champion
This beastly Mag Cannon's auto-loader attachment lets its wielder reload for free once per mission.



Ace
That repeater on the barrel gives this seemingly lowly Mag Rifle a five per cent chance to kill any enemy it hits outright.

The resulting tug-of-war grants campaigns a kind of in-built drama, allowing for genuine highs and lows as you go. In Enemy Unknown, a series of setbacks too easily snowballed into an inescapable death spiral; here, it feels like there's always a chance to claw victory back from the jaws of defeat.

That's assuming you can snatch a few wins on the battlefield, of course. The tactical turn-based missions are still the meat of the experience here, and they're both more punishing and more satisfying than ever. The new classes and equipment enable an incredible spread of strategic possibilities that perfectly complement the far greater variety of mission types on offer, and the now procedurally-generated rather than static maps.

The focus is on adapting to constantly changing objectives. One mission might see you attempt to capture (or, if all else

"IF YOU WERE WORRIED COMBAT WOULD BE DUMBED DOWN, CAST THOSE FEARS ASIDE"

fails, kill) an enemy target; another, protecting a rebel uplink station from alien assault; another, stealing resources from an enemy supply train. Many will start you in 'concealment', a stealth-like mode that allows you to creep up on foes undetected for an ambush - but they'll often also put a timer on their objectives, forcing you to take full advantage of that period of enemy obliviousness as you're pushed into playing faster, more aggressively, and perhaps more recklessly. You're never allowed to settle into one strategy, and as a result the combats never grow stale - each mission

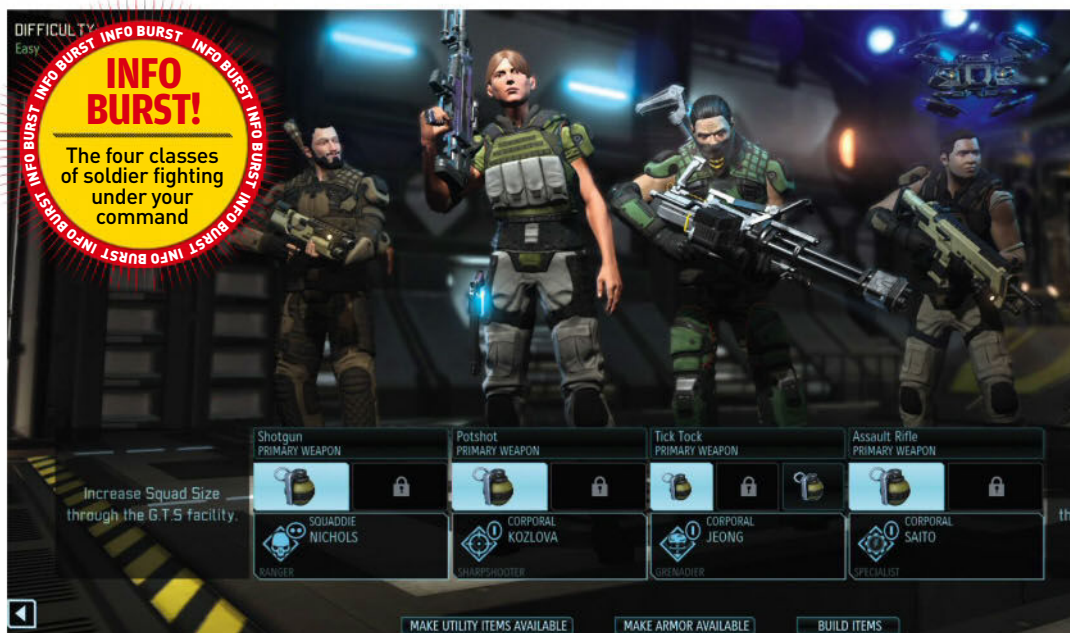
requires its own approach, its own choice of squad, its own gadgets and items.

Rebel hell

Every objective has its own specific purpose, too. Evacuate this VIP, and they'll work for you as a scientist; let too many members of this resistance cell die, and you'll lose contact with the region; fail to steal that data cache, and the aliens will use it to further the Avatar Project. Missions are brilliantly non-binary as a result - rather than just being a case of win-or-lose, kill-or-be-killed, you're constantly weighing up what you want to

achieve and what you're willing to lose or risk to get it. If failing to steal a data cache would spell the end of your game, then you might be willing to sacrifice half your squad to get it; if the aliens are far off from their goals, maybe keeping your team safe is more important, and you might evac out entirely if things get too hairy.

And gosh do things get hairy. If you were worried the combat would be dumbed down for the sequel, cast those fears aside - by our reckoning it's even harder, the enemy ranks packed out with genuinely terrifying units. With the human-like ADVENT soldiers serving as the rank and file, each of the first game's aliens is freed up to become their own kind of elite heavy hitter, with even the previous game's lowly Sectoids becoming psychic powerhouses able to reanimate the dead and mind control your troops. Each feels unbeatable in its own way...



Ranger

An evolution of EU's Assault, this is your battlefield scout and close-range assassin. The first of their skill trees is focused on stealth, allowing them to stay in concealment even when teammates are revealed, and make devastating surprise attacks; the second makes them melee masters, buffing their use of their brutal two-handed swords.

Sharpshooter

More versatile than the Sniper, this class specialises in both long-range support with their rifles, and short-range barrages with their pistols. Spec one way and you get a soldier that can win the mission from half a mile away; another, and you get an Eastwood-alike who can make more shots in a turn than the other classes have had hot dinners.

Grenadier

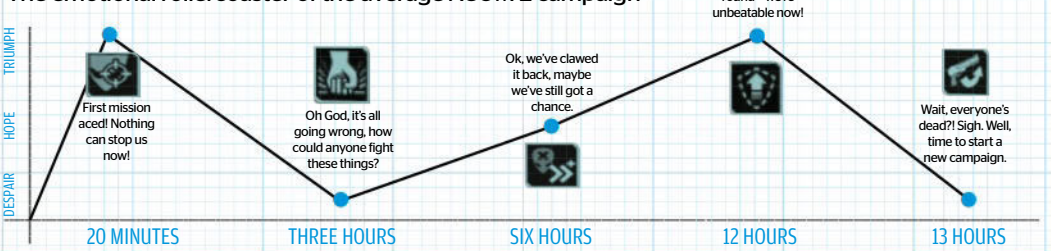
This successor to the first game's Heavy uses a handy grenade launcher to lob explosives far further than their peers. Half their skills focus on demolition, destroying enemy cover and blasting aliens to bits, while the other half let them use their man-portable miniguns to powerful effect, debuffing foes and giving them a bad case of lead poisoning.

Specialist

Their flying Gremlin drone allows this class to act across a far greater range than their Support predecessor, healing and buffing allies from anywhere on the map. The cute little droid can be turned to more aggressive ends too, letting loose electric shocks at aliens for guaranteed damage, and hacking into enemy robots and automated defences.

GAME OF GRAPHS

The emotional rollercoaster of the average XCOM 2 campaign



until, by some miracle, you beat it. The very definition of tough but fair.

Squad war

Even well into the late game, no enemy is ever to be underestimated - their abilities rely not on brute power, but devastating utility, ensuring that even a set of hulking power armour never feels like an impenetrable defence. Get pulled out of cover by a Viper's tongue, bound up in its coils without a friend in sight to free you, and you're done whether you're a fresh-faced rookie or grizzled veteran - it's just a question of how long it takes.

As ever, you'll genuinely care for those soldiers under your command, too. As they advance, gaining abilities from their experiences in the field, it's impossible not to grow attached, and a startlingly in-depth set of customisation options, with more unlocked as they rank up, only

gets you more invested. As an underdog revolution rather than an elite military force, they're designed this time around to look scrappy and ragtag, an instantly endearing look that also allows for a pleasing amount of visual variety.

With so much on offer to praise, it's unfortunate that the game is riddled with frequent, if usually minor, bugs. Little animation and camera glitches occur throughout - actions you should be seeing happen off-screen, soldiers wave their guns around wildly while firing, aliens get stuck in slow-mo - and it creates an overall sense of a lack of polish. More seriously, game-breaking bugs can occur too - we hit one, for example, where we became unable to scan map locations. Not such a big deal when you can reload an earlier save, but for a series known for its Ironman mode, in which that isn't possible, something

like this could bring a 20 hour run to a grinding halt. It's disappointing, considering the game was delayed by months with the express purpose of ironing these problems out.

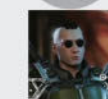
Similar issues plagued the first game on launch too, however, and for the most part were patched out soon after - the same is more than likely to occur here. And, more importantly, it feels a small price to pay in a game that otherwise excels in every conceivable area. Many pretenders have attempted to ape the XCOM formula since Enemy Unknown's release. XCOM 2 sweeps them all aside. It's rare a sequel is such a confident and complete step forward as this - it near perfects every concept its predecessor brought to the table, cutting everything that didn't work and expanding so hugely on what did as to create a near-indefinitely replayable masterpiece. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ The turn-based combat is tight, tense, and brilliantly varied.
- ✓ Brutal but balanced difficulty makes every win a triumph.
- ✓ Out-of-mission gameplay feels totally revitalised.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Frequent bugs contribute to a general lack of polish.



Major Geoff 'Wolfman' Bell
2006 - 2035

Dedicated to the memory of one brave Ranger. Over the course of his career, he survived strangulation, poison gas, and a vigorous bayonetting, but was sadly overcome when the tree he was hiding behind burned down and set him on fire. RIP.

ONLINE



The game includes extensive in-built modding tools, allowing the community to create new modes, aliens, classes, maps, and more. We can't wait to see what they cook up.

GM JUDGEMENT

95%



An instant classic that refines, evolves, and redefines the ideas that came before. Strategy perfection.
Robin Valentine



Iron Man always rocks, but Captain America's pretty ace here too - more so than in the films, actually.

FILM REASSEMBLED

Amazing movie moments

Avengers Assemble is up there with Guardians Of The Galaxy as one of our favourite superhero movies, and most of the game's best bits come from that film.



Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, Wii U, PC, PS3, 360, PS Vita, 3DS **Pub** Warner Bros **Dev** TT Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-2

LEGO MARVEL'S AVENGERS

TT's latest block party is anything but Loki



After 11 years' - and 17 games' - worth of brick-hammering, stud-collecting, and Minifig-smashing, it's safe to say Lego games can occasionally dip their toes into formulaic territory.

Even the recent Dimensions saw little advancement: the real toys were a welcome (if pricey) addition to shelves, but once you stepped through the USB portal, familiarity abounded. Rack up studs, button-bash enemies into submission, smile here and there over some well-placed humour. Fun, sure, but

not very fresh. Which means Avengers - TT's first non toys-to-life effort post-Dimensions - feels all the more stale for covering the same ground again. Right?

Yes and no. There's plenty here you've done before, albeit in a different universe. Digging with Tigra? Identical to Scabbers in Harry Potter. Using Iron Man's laser to melt golden objects? Did that *literally* last week with Scooby Doo. Yet every time seen-it-all-before fatigue threatens to smother your interest in continuing, the reveal of a new character or triggering of a set-piece you loved from the films sucks you back in for another half-hour's play.

A big reason for this is pacing. The game features scenes from six separate

films, but only follows Avengers Assemble and Age Of Ultron chronologically (there's even a mid-game credits sequence to separate the pair). Otherwise, flashbacks and bespoke sub-missions are used to keep things fresh. So when Nick Fury goes to recruit Steve Rogers, as occurs in Assemble, scenes of him training in a boxing ring are sandwiched by playable sequences set in a Hydra HQ and on a train, both taken from Captain America: The First Avenger. It means that even if you know the movies off by heart you're never entirely sure what's coming next, and that's a definite plus.

World weary

The same can't be said of Avengers' open-world areas. In theory, they should add near-limitless variety: once the main adventure is complete, you can explore these seven separate hubs with any character, earning gold bricks and

FOOD FOR THOR

It's all about the yummy, yummy, yummy

From Loki's Helicarrier escape being aided by a gun-toting hot dog to Nick Fury supping milkshakes at even the most critical of moments, nigh-on every laugh-out-loud moment in the game comes via a food- or drink-based sight gag. Black Widow and Bruce Banner share an intense conversation while making eyes at a lone chicken drumstick, Loki casually tucks into a tub of popcorn while in hiding from Captain America and Iron Man, and a furious Hulk chase on board the moving sky-fort ends with the big guy taking a wet fish to the face. They're simple gags, sure, but a very welcome break from the game's sound issues within cut-scenes, which often undercut the comedy elsewhere.

"EVEN IF YOU KNOW THE MOVIES OFF BY HEART, YOU'RE NEVER SURE WHAT'S COMING NEXT"



Heart collecting returns, but it's essentially pointless; you can't die, you just lose a load of studs if you run out of life.

The Avengers' helicarrier features some standout moments and cutscenes, plus a great cameo from a plane-helming Stan Lee.

Switching characters solves puzzles, as ever. Here, America pulls a lever which causes a gold wall, which Iron Man is able to melt, to appear.

Continuing a sad theme, neither Chris Evans (no, the actor one!) nor Robert Downey Jr recorded any supplemental dialogue for the game.

completing side quests. But too many of these bonus missions feel like busywork that, again, you've endured a hundred times before. Bump off a few goons to unlock Deadpool. Fetch and collect assorted fruit to obtain Fin Fang Foom. And races, so many races. Too often the reward doesn't make up for the energies spent earning it.

Not that completionists aren't well-served if they can be bothered to grind to the finish. The roster won't appeal to casual comic book fans to the extent that Lego Marvel Super Heroes did, but if Avengers is your thing, TT has served up a sumptuous smorgasbord of treats. All the characters from the films are here, with one memorably chaotic level flipping expectations and placing you in control of Baron Strucker and Doctor List as they fend off the good guys. But the comic books are well served too, with more than 100 total characters – all of whom have their own individual run, walk, and idle animation. Leave Cottonmouth waiting for a few moments and he eats a surfboard. Cool. Weird, but cool.

As ever, these characters have skills which come in especially useful if you can stomach a second, unlockables-focused playthrough, but it's a particularly enjoyable nuance to combat that adds the most diversity. Namely, the option to unleash a special character combo move

by tapping circle once adjacent to one another. (A human partner is ideal for this, but the AI does a capable job.) Hawkeye can propel Black Widow skywards, enabling her to fire off a round of bullets from above, while Hulk uses Thor as a hammer, slamming him into nearby foes.

Hill switch

The game's most memorable moments, however, come not through combat – even when freshened up by those character combos – but TT switching up conventions and abandoning platforming and adventuring altogether. An on-rails, drive 'n' gun chase scene featuring Maria Hill and Agent Williams enjoyably recalls GTA, Black Widow's corridor run from a furious Hulk on board the heroes' Helicarrier is constantly precarious if short, and there are even sublime nods to Resogun via shooty airbound sequences featuring Iron Man and a Black Widow-piloted jet fighter.

These scenes, as you've come to expect from Lego titles, are a glorious summer holiday for the eyeballs. Less so the ears, disappointingly. We've never been fans of the decision, from DC Super Heroes 2 onwards, to use real voices in the Lego games, as various characters' sighing, mumbling, and groaning at opportune times added to the humour of the Star Wars games which started it all. In Avengers not only does the characters'

speaking reduce those chances for humour, but there's a very clear difference in quality between dialogue chopped from the movie and that recorded specifically for the game.

What you end up with are genuinely funny new lines from the likes of Clark 'Agent Coulson' Gregg and Cobie 'Maria Hill' Smulders, interspersed with recycled bits from Nick Fury and Black Widow, to name two. The new lines sound crisp and clear; the film cuts in as though siphoned through a soggy bathmat. It's not unusual for major Hollywood stars to be too busy to record dialogue for games, but if Samuel L Jackson and Scarlett Johansson weren't available (or affordable), then the decision to use dialogue at all should have been reconsidered. TT is deservedly known for the polish in its games, but here sound woes cause some deep scuffs.

We dislike the old conclusion that any game is for 'fans of the series' alone, because it's often the easiest, laziest judgement call to make. With Lego Avengers, however, there is some truth to that trite cliché. Its adventuring and platforming foundations are beginning to show wear, and while open-world areas and non-uniform sub-levels deliver variety, they don't inspire repeat plays like the older games in the series. For fan service, it can't be faulted. Longevity-wise, it's no Iron Man. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ The main six heroes and their special combos are a ton of fun.
- ✓ Cobie Smulders as Maria Hill steals the show.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Boss battles are too often reduced to QTEs.
- ✗ Dialogue from the films is poorly used throughout.

Better than...



Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham

Batsy's gruffness just makes him seem like a jerk, and levels across space feel at odds with the series' origins.

Worse than...



Lego Marvel Super Heroes

TT's current-gen debut wins out due to its far more impressive roster, and lack of clunky movie audio.

DLC



Nine characters are available to purchase via the Captain America: Civil War pack, with 11 more due soon in the Ant-Man pack. The catch: they're PlayStation exclusives.

GM JUDGEMENT

67%



Pays lip service to the subject material admirably – but prioritises caution over innovation.
Ben Wilson

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** EA **Developer** Coldwood Interactive **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

UNRAVEL

Red thread redemption

There's something sinister about this title's hero, Yarny. The game might bookend itself with heartwarming messages about love, loss, and time-broken bonds, but over six hours this fuzzy red devil has, quite literally, woven a tale of destruction across the countryside. It lures you in with sun-drenched gardens and the plight of a lonely old woman, but you'll soon find Yarny's knotted entrails draped over everything from gassed gophers to lakes of toxic sewage as he seeks out lost tokens from her youth. Hey, at least it reminds us to give our nan a quick ring to make sure her wool basket hasn't gone all Sorcerer's Apprentice on her.

It's a physics-led puzzle platformer, not unlike gloomy gem Limbo. And while there's nothing here quite as terrible as pulling legs off a spider, beneath Unravel's soft, stringy exterior beats a

darker heart than you might expect. You wouldn't know it from the folksy violins crooning away in the background, but you can see it in Yarny himself. Tethered to a ball of wool at grandma's house, the further he travels the scrawnier he becomes, until eventually his shrinking innards can barely support the weight of his own noggin, causing him to pant and snag as he reaches the end of the line.

Dyed in the wool

Fortunately, each trip down memory lane is peppered with spools of wool that renew Yarny's belly, equipping him with the thread he needs to carry on propelling himself forward. He can swing, abseil, and yank everyday items into place, all achieved by lassoing his intestines at interactive glints. Problem is, it does rather limit puzzle solutions to playing 'spot the red tassel', and there's an over-reliance on bridging nearby knots to create new routes to heave objects up. Once you've seen this puzzle tens of times the precise platforming begins to feel slack.

Reliance on physics to drive the puzzling also results in tasks that can conclude sloppily. An early crab-catching exercise, for instance, seemed to suggest the need for a multi-crustacean death trap, but instead of (presumably) dropping a giant cage on all four pairs of pincers, we simply lured three far enough over for us to chance a fluky jump over the fourth, proving that Unravel still has some way to go before it can match Limbo's more exacting style of design.

For the most part, though, Unravel packs in memorable set-pieces, cleverly teasing obstacles from your natural surroundings. Based on Coldwood's Swedish (and beautifully-rendered) home, it sticks in the mind much longer than cookie-cutter snow/fire/jungle worlds. From rolling pine cones into ice-shattering snowballs to tense gauntlet runs across fields of dive-bombing crows, Unravel revels in the wonder of the natural world.

More importantly, Coldwood has its heart in the right place here, and Unravel's simple yet affecting yarn tugs at the heartstrings by the time your journey ends. Throw in some fiendishly hidden buttons and Unravel even holds up for a second run. Yarny might be the devil incarnate, but if he can stop our folks from becoming isolated John Lewis-style space granddads, he gets a free pass from us. ■

"HE CAN SWING, ABSEIL, AND YANK EVERYDAY ITEMS INTO PLACE, ALL BY LASSOING WITH HIS INTESTINES"

GM LOVES...

- ✓ Its naturally emerging set-piece puzzles never feel contrived.
- ✓ Abseiling down and swinging over pits is immensely satisfying.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Some of its puzzles can be rather obtuse at times.
- ✗ Yarny's all but useless as soon as he falls into a puddle.

Better than...



Yoshi's Woolly World

Yarny might not be able to transform into an adorable fuzzy tank, but at least his hidden collectibles aren't bloody invisible.

Worse than...



Limbo

Playdead's monochrome masterpiece lacks the vibrancy of Yarny's Scandi-inspired playgrounds, but its physics puzzles are the best in the biz.

i NEED TO KNOW



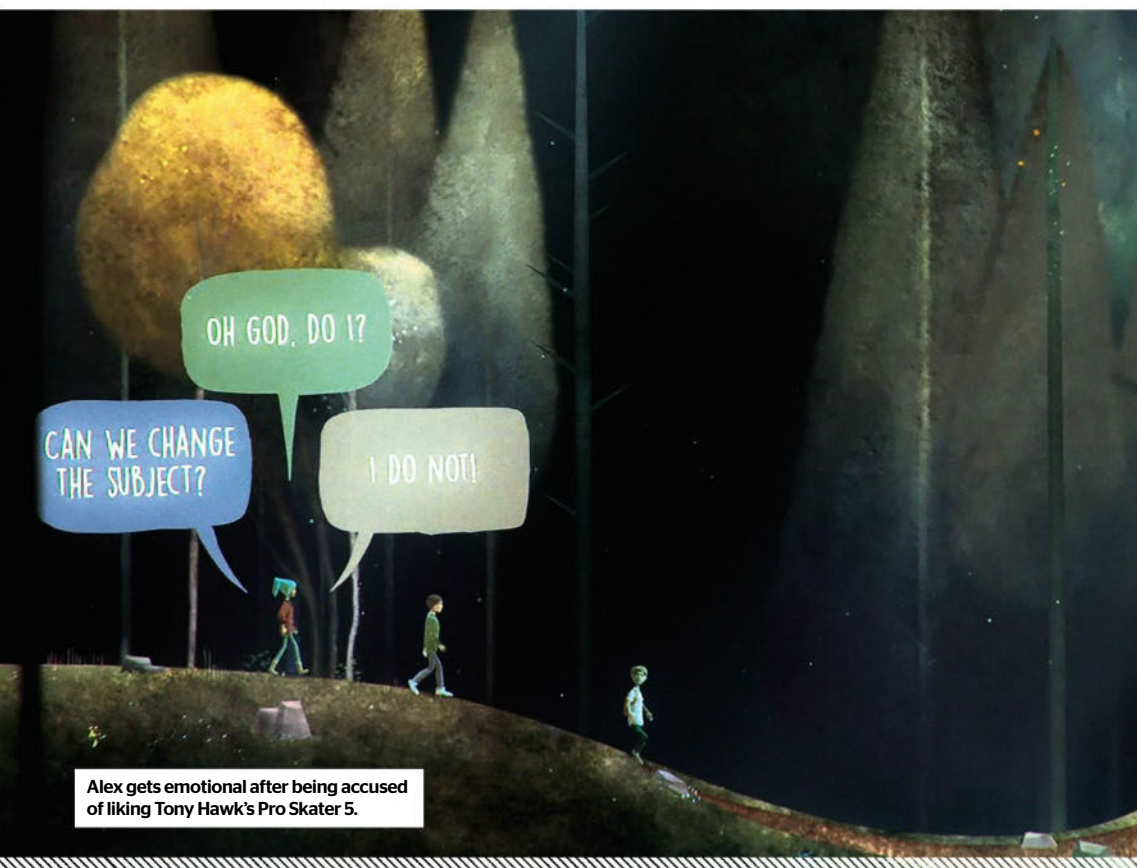
Xbox One owners who subscribe to EA Access can try out the first two levels of Unravel absolutely free. You'll also get a 10 per cent discount if you decide to purchase the game afterwards.

GM JUDGEMENT

78%



Its puzzles can be a little woolly, but Unravel has endless spools of charm.
Matt Sakuraoka-Gillman



Alex gets emotional after being accused of liking Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5.

Format XO (reviewed), PC Publisher Night School Studio Developer Night School Studio ETA Out now Players 1

OXENFREE

Rescue enslaved bovines in this... wait, wrong game

When you were a teen, were you one of the cool kids, out drinking, snogging, and partying? Or were you, like us, more likely to stay at home in your room fiddling with a pocket radio? Those in the (perhaps rather specific) latter camp will likely find a kindred spirit in Alex, the blue-haired teenage lead of this creepy adventure game.

She's brought her radio to Edwards Island, where it lets her tap into strange signals, cryptic Morse code messages, and olde-timey music perfect for doing the Charleston to - tuning it to interact with the environment is this adventure game's main hook. After Alex inadvertently releases sinister forces, she must use it to open doors, activate parts of the island, or just enjoy some tunes.

A nice idea, disappointingly wasted. Tuning to the correct signal to progress is as simple as scrolling through numbers until the controller shakes. You'd have a

more challenging time putting the batteries in, and sadly, that's about as tough as the 'puzzles' get. Edwards Island is at least attractive to explore, courtesy of great character and art design - but the artists' wrists must have gotten tired, because it's also pretty small, with little to see and plenty of backtracking. Just because your adventure is set over a single night, doesn't mean it should feel this abruptly short. So with all these flaws, why even talk about Oxenfree?

Talk radio

Because it has some of the best conversations we've ever seen in games. Joining Alex are her new step-brother Jonas, best friend Ren, mean girl Clarissa, and shy type Nona. These teens break free from their stereotypes thanks to strong characterisation and excellent writing. Dialogue is fast, funny, and often emotionally engaging, but it's how it's delivered that truly impresses.

An early camp-fire scene shows Oxenfree at its best. During conversations, speech bubbles appear over Alex. Choose

a quip, or forever hold your silence. But the conversation will carry on without you if you don't speak up. You have to cut people off to get your say, just like in real life (if you don't think that's true, try not interrupting anyone for 24 hours. People will think you've swallowed your tongue).

It's jarring initially, but once you engage with Oxenfree's conversational rhythms, you'll find exchanges, arguments, and jokes flowing more naturally than a mountain stream. While there are a few unrealistic gaps and awkward pauses (though there are plenty of awkward situations - sorry for letting Nona know you liked her, Ren), every developer should play Oxenfree right now. This form of natter should become a new chat-happy standard.

The mystery of the island has its moments, too. Surreal sequences where the island warps and time loops are unsettling, if overused - but it's a richer experience when it focuses on its cast. A heated row with Clarissa, a heart-to-heart with Jonas, and an encounter with someone from Alex's past - these are moments that stay with you. An impressive amount of variation in dialogue and character beats justifies a replay too, if you're willing to endure a lot of walking and little challenge. Oxenfree stops just short of being essential, but tune in for some winning storytelling. ■

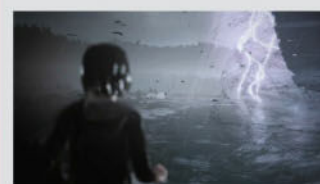
GM LOVES...

- ✓ The dialogue and characters are hugely entertaining.
- ✓ Conversations feel uniquely natural and realistic.

GM HATES...

- ✗ The puzzles are tediously simplistic throughout.
- ✗ It's just a bit too short and confined for its own good.

Better than...



Life Is Strange

Oxenfree gets off to a far better start, and comes complete with dialogue that you believe a teenager might (gasp!) actually say...

Worse than...



Life Is Strange

...but Dontnod is better at gameplay, pacing, and handling dark subject matter. We're pining for a mash-up of the two games' strengths.

i NEED TO KNOW

There's an Oxenfree movie in the works. No info yet, but we predict Rose McIver doing a great turn as Alex, against a poorly miscast Michael Cera as Ren. Maybe we should stick to writing about games.

GM JUDGEMENT

78%

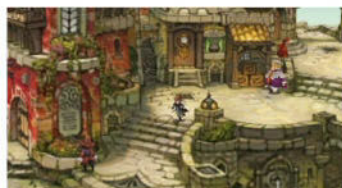
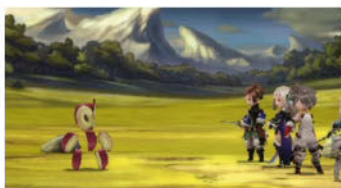
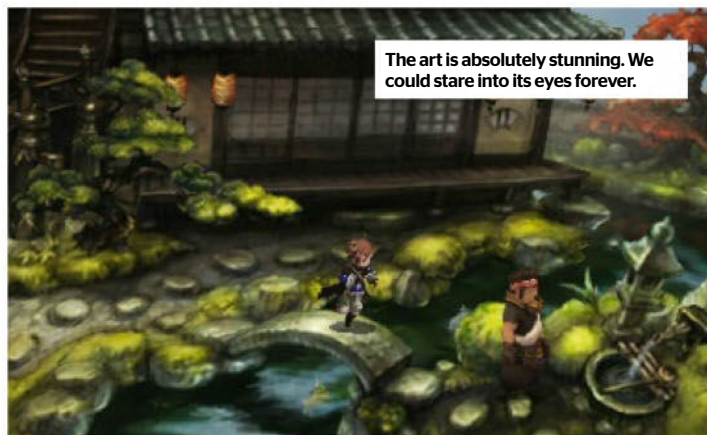


Look past lame puzzles and a short run time, and you'll find five great characters to chat to.
Tom Stone

"THIS HAS ONE OF THE BEST DIALOGUE SYSTEMS WE'VE EVER SEEN IN GAMES"

GM Review

The Final Verdict



Format 3DS Publisher Nintendo Developer Silicon Studio, Square Enix ETA 26 February Players 1

BRAVELY SECOND: END LAYER

Good looks, good fights – but don't quit your day Job



Suppressing a chortle having read the name of this dubiously titled JRPG sequel? Well, just remember this:

In Japanese the words 'chin chin' mean 'willy'. Not actually that bad a slice of Japanese-English garble, now huh?

Bravely Second is an incredibly hard game to talk about without sounding like a complete weirdo, and it gets even worse when you start throwing in some of the game's terminology, such as Brave points and Abilinking. There's certainly a significant knowledge barrier here, but persist and behind all of that bluster you'll find a solid adventure.

Set two and a half years after the events of the original, Bravely Default, Second follows the tale of Crystalguard Cavalier Yew, who sets out to rescue Pope Agnès after she's abruptly kidnapped by

the evil Kaiser Oblivion. Betrayal, peril, romance, and plenty of fighting follow as you meet up with new and old characters on your journey. It's a straightforward setup, but the lore of the world of Luxendarc runs deep – while the game does a good job of briefing you on the story, you're still going to miss out on a lot if you never finished the last game. It also shares a lot in common with older Final Fantasy titles, including item names such as Phoenix Downs, and a plot following the adventures of four warriors of light and their escapades with crystals.

Default towers

The battle system is almost exactly the same as before and is the real highlight of the series. You can choose to attack as normal, Default on your turn to briefly boost defence and save up a turn, or Brave by using up multiple turns at once. It's a really neat take on turn-based combat that adds a new tactical layer to

proceedings. Do you charge forward multiple times to hit heavily but then risk not attacking back for several turns, or do you bide your time and play defensively until you're ready to strike?

There are also 30 Jobs (AKA classes) to choose from, which you'll unlock as you go. You'll start out a simple Freelancer who uses sword strikes to attack and can learn useful abilities such as Examine to learn about the monsters you face, but you'll soon be able to wield powerful elemental magic with the Wizard class (who, usefully, can cast defensive as well as offensive spells), or equip multiple weapons at once as a Charioteer (basically a horse-inspired warrior). You've also got your standard Knights, Thieves, and White Mages, but things get a little odd when you reach the Pâtissier (who can create sweets that dish out various dangerous status effects such as poison and paralysis) and the Catmancer (who learns attacks from enemies and uses

them by absorbing items). Despite there being so many of them, each of the Jobs feels unique and well-balanced. There's no 'best' way to set up your party - the system's flexible enough for you to choose your favourites.

The fighting has been tweaked since the last entry to make things simpler. You can now save presets to make switching Jobs far easier, and if you kill all of your opponents in one turn you can challenge a second wave straight away for a greater reward, which comes in handy when you're trying to boost your level.

While these things definitely help streamline proceedings, however, it still feels old-fashioned in some ways. While there's less of a grind this time around for normal levelling, you *will* still find yourself repeating your footsteps to make the most of the new Jobs. Having such a large range of different fighting styles to experiment with is a joy, but unlocking new abilities for them is tough going, as you have to tediously level each one from scratch for every individual party member. You can power through without the need to switch Jobs too often if you prefer, but if you want to fully test what your party is capable of, you'll have to put in a *lot* of work.

All talk

But while the world is beautiful and the battle system is fun, Bravely Second falls down when it comes to its dialogue and characters. You've got your typical melodrama in spades, but every now and then it tries to shoehorn in comedy and odd pop-culture references. There's nothing inherently wrong with being goofy or cracking a joke - it can help

"YOU CAN ATTACK AS NORMAL, DEFAULT TO BOOST DEFENCE, OR USE MULTIPLE TURNS AT ONCE"

break tension and reveal softer sides to otherwise hardened warriors - but Bravely Second just never does it well. It picks the oddest moments to have a skit about cake, and at one point it even breaks the fourth wall by having Yew accuse you as a player for judging him as a coward. These things are intended to poke fun at well-trodden tropes and clichés in anime and other games, but it relies far too much on you being in on the joke. Its humour isn't universal, so instead of it coming off as a cheeky bit of fun, you simply feel yourself breaking away like battenberg in bathwater.

The cast is also... let's say, odd. Returning party members Edea and Tiz are certainly likeable, but new hero Yew is overly dramatic and whiny - you can't help but be irritated by him as he over-embellishes stories for his diary in the same way as that one annoying friend you have who brags about how they were a victim in the most mundane of situations. "Oh no, you went for a walk

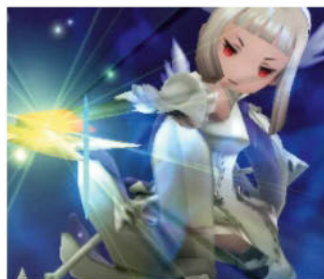
CAREER ADVICE

A change of vocation could do you good

With 30 Jobs to choose from to make up your party, each boasting its own unique abilities in battle, there's a lot to get to grips with. We certainly won't blame you for getting overwhelmed. Here are our favourite picks - if you're stuck, we reckon these Jobs'll do you right.



2 An odd new addition, the Patissier's skills all revolve around cooking up status-effect-inducing oddities.



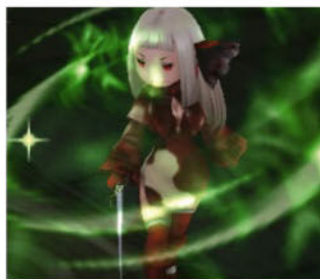
4 Valkyries act like Final Fantasy's beloved Dragoons, jumping high into the air and using spear attacks.



1 The Black Mage is your standard heavy-hitting magic wielder. Wizards are similar but more versatile.



3 Bishops are high-powered healers, and capable of dealing a massive amount of holy damage.



5 Wielding in effect a massive undo button, Exorcists heal by returning your HP to what it was the turn before.



TO THE MOON AND BACK

Building up your base

Magnolia is the last of her moon-dwelling people, and during your adventure you'll be tasked with rebuilding her home on the lunar surface. It's just like the town-building minigame in Bravely Default where you can erect stations in real time to help benefit you later in the main game. It's a cute distraction, but it won't hinder your journey if you don't get into it.

in the rain and now you're sad because you're wet? That's... nice."

Magnolia is equally peculiar. While being a warrior from the moon *does* probably come with an inherent degree of weirdness, for some reason everything she says is given a flourish of French babbling at the end of it. It's meant to give the impression that she's exotic, but merely adding an accent isn't enough to define an entire personality trait. It also doesn't help that if you've ever picked up a smattering of basic French, you'll quickly realise that she's pretty much just repeating herself like a mad woman.

It's the accumulation of these little things that lets Bravely Second down. It's got the right parts for a fine role-playing adventure, but all those petty annoyances just keep taking you out of the moment. It feels very much like you're playing it through a sheet of glass - sure, you can see and appreciate how exquisite it is, but you can't ever truly connect with it.

This is still a great little RPG with one of the best twists on turn-based combat in recent memory, so if you're a fan of the genre or enjoyed the original Bravely Default there's still a lot to love here. Just don't expect a smooth adventure or a story to remember. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ The art in towns is stunning - among the best on 3DS.
- ✓ Defaulting and Braving put a neat spin on turn-based combat.

GM HATES...

- ✗ The 'comedy' references and gags miss far more than they hit.
- ✗ The game breaks the fourth wall and your immersion with it.

Better than...



Bravely Default

The subtle menu tweaks and battle adjustments are an improvement on the original, but only just. They still both suffer from poor characterisation.

Worse than...



Final Fantasy IV

The Bravely games are reminiscent of old-school Final Fantasys, but the real thing is miles better. This DS remake of the original FFIV is brilliantly charming.

i NEED TO KNOW



We weren't able to test the StreetPass functions in our playthrough, but in the final game you'll be able to summon people you walk by to deal damage for you in your place in battle. Handy!

GM JUDGEMENT

78%



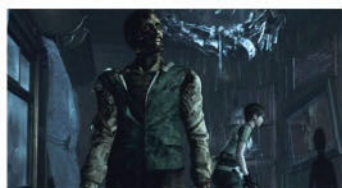
A great combat system and world held back by immersion-breaking dialogue choices.
Daniella Lucas

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Now look, Mr Giant Scorpion, I don't care about those massive pincers. You really have to show me your rail card.



Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC, PS3, 360 Publisher Capcom Developer Capcom ETA Out now Players 1

RESIDENT EVIL ZERO HD REMASTER

All aboard for an old-school horror treat

If nothing else, Capcom's spooky prequel should give you a new respect for National Rail. You might have suffered delays on lethargic locos, but it's unlikely the conductor has ever tried to eat your face. Enter the Ecliptic Express, the scariest damn virtual train you'll ever board. As opening acts go, enduring zombie-filled carnage on battered carriages in this remastered fright fest is hard to top. It's just a pity the route that follows can't quite maintain the terror, with uneven action threatening to send it completely off the rails.

A direct prequel to 2002's Gamecube Resi 'RE-make', Resident Evil Zero originally shuffled onto Nintendo's adorable purple box a year after the Spencer mansion nightmare. Following Rebecca Chambers in the hours leading up to all that undead unpleasantness in the Arklay Mountains, the game's story

sees the STARS medic reluctantly teaming with hunky escaped felon Billy Coen. Cue an origin story that charts the evil beginnings of Umbrella and hits you with dialogue so aggressively awful you can almost feel your brain cells evaporate as the words seep into your ears.

Not that you're here for pithy scripting. Like last year's original Resi remaster, Zero is all about careful resource management, controlled zombie slaughter, obscure puzzles, and the prettiest pre-rendered backdrops you ever saw. Thanks to more caring restoration work, said backgrounds look nothing short of sumptuous, with exquisite detailing of rain-lashed train windows or a chillingly-lit human-sized chessboard jumping from the screen thanks to the bump in resolution.

It's not just the 1080p treatment, 16:9 widescreen support, or the more detailed character models that make this spruced-up package feel surprisingly fresh for a 13-year-old title. A more streamlined moveset takes the pain out of the original's tank controls; couple that with Zero's "partner zapping" – a feature that

lets you swap between Billy and Rebecca on-the-fly – and you're left with one of Resi's more accommodating entries. Also, you can drop loot and ammo when your inventory slots are full, then pick them back up at a more convenient time. Screw you, (thankfully nixed) item boxes!

On rails shooter

Surviving Zero's horrors can be less of a chore than the RE-make, sure. Yet while staying on top of resources is easier, it also means there's less nail-gnawing tension when the big setpieces hit. It doesn't help that many encounters feel like poorly printed out photocopies of Spencer Mansion's best bits. Battling with a big bat or oversized centipede can't compare to electrifying a 50-foot shark or eliminating a colossal snake. Still, massive kudos to Zero for the zombie baboons.

While the balance of puzzling and edgy combat often satisfies, pacing problems grate. Unlike Chris and Jill's haunted house, the areas following that awesome train don't always excite. A gorgeous but cluttered Umbrella training facility, one too many dank basements, and a dull plant area make the game run out of steam when you've hopped off the choo-choo. Yet while the whole journey doesn't always delight, there are enough memorable stops along the way to make this horror outing worth jumping on. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ Dropping items means goodbye to tedious ammo management.
- ✓ You battle zombie monkeys. The world needs more undead apes.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Later sections fail to match a truly brilliant opening.
- ✗ A dud plot revolves around a singing dude made of leeches.

Better than...



Resident Evil 6

A bloated shooter that ditches the horror and doubles down on questionable cover-based action as the series loses its direction.

Worse than...



Resident Evil

A sumptuous horror remake that breathes fresh life into a terrifying (if somewhat campy) classic. Thoughtful, tense and chillingly crafted.

I NEED TO KNOW

Resident Evil Zero was originally designed for the N64, not the Gamecube. Thanks to the limited storage of the console's cartridges, though, the game was pushed back a generation.

GM JUDGEMENT

72%



An uneven but occasionally excellent update to one of Resi's most overlooked entries.
Dave Meikleham

"BATTLING A BIG BAT OR CENTIPEDE CAN'T COMPARE TO ELECTRIFYING A 50-FOOT GREAT WHITE"



The Hopeless Soul and Satan both drive the story on. One is trying to escape, the other wants to trap you with ponies.



Format PC **Publisher** Daniel Mullins Games **Developer** Daniel Mullins Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

PONY ISLAND

A dark puzzle adventure worth ponying up the cash for

Steam isn't short of horsey-based hijinks. Equestrian fans can 'enjoy' such budget casual titles as *Pony World 3*, *Secret Of The Magic Crystals*, or *My Riding Stables*. These aren't so much games people buy, as jokes people gift to their friends. *Pony Island* is not one of these games. It's as strange, as clever, and as unexpected a game as you're likely to see this year.

On the face of it, *Pony Island* is a cheerful 2D side-scroller. There's a unicorn, a series of fences, and a jump button. It's mind-numbingly tedious, and that's entirely the point. Behind the cheerful facade lies a dark secret. *Pony Island*'s Steam page is quite open about what lies beneath, but we'd recommend you experience it with as little foreknowledge as possible. If you're prepared to take the gamble on a dark, weird, and at times quite creepy little game, know that we're giving it 85% and head off to play it right now.

Gift horse

Still here? That's understandable – it's called *Pony Island*, after all. The story behind the cheerful tedium is that you're in Limbo, and Satan is making his move. He's trapped you in a maddening pony game and set your soul as the price of escape. But rather than accept consignment to Hell, you're given a chance to be free by a mysterious entity known only as Hopeless Soul.

The true meat of *Pony Island* lies behind the game, in your attempts to corrupt and destroy it. It warps and shifts beautifully, with menus and options falling apart as you prod and poke at things. Hopeless Soul has the ability to open portals into the code and, through these simple logic puzzles, you can start to turn things to your advantage. Early on, Satan sends waves of enemies you have no hope of defeating. Through one of Soul's portals, you can enable a laser beam that lets you progress.

Pony Island is at its best when it bursts out of the in-fiction game, playing instead

on the fake desktop of Satan's computer. Here you type messages to the game's characters, and hack into new profiles in order to find and delete the Core Files to destroy the system.

The best sequence involves a demon called Asmodeus. His seemingly simple Q&A challenge winds up being a memorable encounter that blurs the line between fiction and reality. It's jaw-droppingly clever, and managed to deceive us despite telling us that we were about to be deceived. Sound vague? It's one of the most refreshingly original pieces of puzzle design we've played, and demands to be experienced unspoilt.

Despite all this, *Pony Island* still requires you to spend a lot of its running time making a unicorn jump over fences. There's an argument that the tedium of this challenge makes the rest of the game more enjoyable, but it is tedium all the same. The logic puzzles, too, are basic, and slightly too numerous across the game's short running time.

The worst that can be said is that there's some padding between *Pony Island*'s most exceptional moments. As a pace-breaker, it's welcome, but you're always waiting for the next unexpected event. Fortunately, it never quite wears out its welcome. It can be finished in a couple of hours, but a single playthrough won't uncover all of its secrets... ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ It's funny and imaginative, with plenty of stand-out moments.
- ✓ It looks fantastic as it corrupts and warps around your actions.
- ✓ The Asmodeus sequence is a triumph, piercing the fourth wall.

GM HATES...

- ✗ The pony sections may annoy deliberately, but they still annoy.

Better than...



The Magic Circle

A neat, satirical experience all about unfinished games. It's a little bland-looking, though, and has a few frustrating elements.

Worse than...



The Stanley Parable

Just about as good as a fourth-wall-breaking meta-narrative about choice and game stories can be. By turns philosophical and genuinely funny.

i NEED TO KNOW



Keep an eye out for tickets. They're well hidden in options menus and via secret codes, but manage to find all 24 of them and you'll unlock a new ending that furthers the story.

GM JUDGEMENT

85%



Short, cheap, and unbelievably clever. *Pony Island* is no less than the first great indie game of 2016.
Phil Savage

"THE TRUE MEAT LIES BEHIND THE GAME, IN YOUR ATTEMPTS TO CORRUPT AND DESTROY IT"

What disgusting phrase did we type at Asmodeus's request? Nope, we can't, this is a family-friendly magazine.

Firewatch is beautiful but heavily stylised, not photorealistic. It's a bit like Team Fortress 2, only without guns.



Format PS4, PC (reviewed) Publisher Panic Developer Campo Santo ETA Out now Players 1

FIREWATCH

Will Campo Santo's debut start a flame in your heart?

The concept of an indie supergroup is tricky, the relative anonymity of all but the most notable of developers making it difficult to pinpoint the origins of any one team. Firewatch developer Campo Santo is the exception. It features, among others, Jake Rodkin and Sean Vanaman of Telltale's *The Walking Dead*, *Gone Home* composer Chris Remo, *Mark Of The Ninja* designer Nels Anderson, and artist Ollly Moss.

In short, this first-person adventure boasts more pedigree than the VIP lounge at Crufts. Despite being a small-scale, narrative-focused game, Firewatch has attracted plenty of hype. For the most part, it lives up to it. This a quiet, contemplative work, but also funny, charming, and likeable.

It's set in the Wyoming wilderness in the exceptionally hot, dry summer of

1989. You play as Henry, a rugged but good-natured guy from Boulder, Colorado. You meet him as he's travelling to his summer job as one of a network of lookouts – people stationed throughout the National Park, who act as an early warning system for forest fires. It's implied early on that it's the sort of thing you do when you're running away from your problems. Henry absolutely is.

Run to the hills

The intro to Firewatch intercuts Henry's arrival at the Two Forks lookout station with a simple, text-based rundown of his marriage up to that point. These text sections work like a Twine engine game – a choose-your-own path of branching decisions that let you define the highs and lows of his relationship. It's a beautifully understated sequence, and tragic in a way that feels realistic. This isn't Pixar's *Up*, and Henry's sadness isn't so neatly encapsulated. It's more messy and human. He's an imperfect man in a

heartbreaking situation, and that makes him a protagonist you can relate to.

His first job, upon reaching the tower, is to find the source of some nearby fireworks. On a mechanical level, Firewatch is a game of exploration and orienteering. You have a map and compass, and must use these to find your location and navigate to it. It's a satisfying system, helped largely by the fact that – unlike on real maps – Henry's exact location is always on display.

It is not, it has to be said, a particularly challenging experience. Picking a general direction, you must navigate up ledges and down rocks, but there's no danger that's not explicitly scripted into the story. The environment does hem you in at first – at least until you find certain tools that expand your area of exploration. Beyond that small concession to pacing, though, there's no actual difficulty to speak of. Like *Gone Home* before it, Firewatch's mechanics and environment act as a foundation for the narrative drama. The difference is that Wyoming looks far more sumptuous and inviting than a '90s teen's bedroom.

The other half of Firewatch is its conversations, through which the story unfolds. Henry's only point of contact is Delilah, his supervisor, who lives on the



HAND DRAWN

How Henry knows Gordon

One of most striking aspects of Firewatch is how Henry interacts with his environment. Most first-person games don't bother animating arms or legs, but Henry has a real physicality and fluidity. He'll grab objects and clamber up walls. His animations were created by James Benson, whose early work (on his YouTube channel) includes *Team Fortress 2* short *Dance Fortress* (<http://bit.ly/DanceFortress>) and a *Half-Life* trailer with custom animations for all of Gordon Freeman's actions (<http://bit.ly/BensonHL>). Before joining Campo Santo, Benson also worked as an animator and designer on the gorgeous *Ori And The Blind Forest*.

"HE'S AN IMPERFECT MAN IN A HEARTBREAKING SITUATION – A PROTAGONIST YOU CAN RELATE TO"

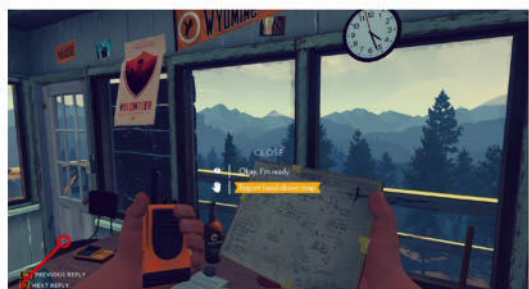
DEAL WITH WHOEVER IS SETTING OFF FIREWORKS

As you explore the world, you'll find a series of supply caches. The information inside will update your map with new routes and nearby landmarks.

The UI is incredibly sparse. Mostly it shows only the name of whatever Henry is looking at, and whether or not he can call Delilah about it.

Firewatch takes place across a decent sized chunk of land, and offers plenty of nooks and crannies in which to find little secrets and bonuses.

Games rarely require proper orienteering, but Firewatch doesn't mark your destination on the map. You'll need the compass to find your way.



The world is filled with incidental objects that Henry can report to Delilah. You never know which will be important.



The life of a lookout is usually a boring one. Luckily, Henry has an atypical summer, starting with some drunken teens.

neighbouring tower of Thorofare, miles to the north. They can communicate only via a walkie-talkie. Delilah is pleasant company - funny and reassuring, although occasionally susceptible to fits of pique. In one early conversation, she torments Henry with a series of lightning puns so shocking you'd think she was writing for a games magazine.

Anything that can be remarked upon displays a little radio icon, which is your prompt to bring up the menu and select a conversation option. For the most part it's just chit-chat - admiring the beauty of the location or the thoughtlessness of campers, or enquiring about previous inhabitants. By so well capturing Henry's isolation, Firewatch highlights the importance of Delilah. Even the smallest conversations feel important to Henry's sanity, and it's sweet to see the pair's friendship grow.

It's also possible to rile Delilah up in the course of your conversations. While the main thrust of the plot is set in stone, you get plenty of room to manoeuvre within these boundaries. Henry's personality is defined but loose, and your choices serve to bring forth aspects of his persona. Opt to say something inconsiderate, and

Delilah will step away in annoyance, an icon on the screen serving as a constant reminder of her absence. It highlights how tenuous your connection is, but we rarely found ourselves in this position. Normal life rules apply: don't act like a total dick, and you'll avoid the doghouse.

Burn notice

On top of the personal drama is a larger mystery. It unfolds slowly, but ties into the ransacking of Henry's tower on his first night in the forest. This early drama builds in surprising ways that feel like they wouldn't be out of place in *Lost*. The constant question is how much of what's happening is real, and how much is paranoia brought on by isolation. While tense in the moment, this aspect of the story does feel like a distraction.

Campo Santo plays its hand close to its chest. Firewatch looks cartoony and stylised, but depicts a seemingly realistic world. So the question becomes not what will happen to Henry so much as what genre of story have the writers created? Horror, sci-fi, thriller, none of the above? It's not quite clear until the end, and the guessing creates a distancing effect that undermines its final revelations.

Firewatch is at its best when it's grounded, exploring the relationship between its two central characters. And despite the lack of any real challenge, the space that Campo Santo has created is a joy to explore. The Wyoming wilderness looks beautiful, and Henry's animations as he mantles over rocks and rappels down cliffs gives him a real sense of presence within the world. The soundtrack, too, fits the mood perfectly - sparsely situated in the most dramatic moments, and shifting as the nature of that drama changes.

It's short - about four hours for our playthrough, which feels a good length for the story being told. We see multiple days across Henry's summer, the scenes skipping forward to the most notable bits while still highlighting the monotony that would make up the bulk of the job. While the high-level narrative structure feels uneven, Firewatch is worth playing for Henry and Delilah. They feel grounded and realistic in a way that few game characters do: funny and flawed, selfless and selfish, fearful and heroic in equal measure. They're complex people with complex problems that offer no easy resolution. It's the mystery of *them* that is ultimately what makes the game work. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ The world looks gorgeous, and is rich with detail.
- ✓ Conversations are naturalistic and often charming and funny.
- ✓ The soundtrack is the perfect accompaniment to the action.

GM HATES...

- ✗ The larger mystery ultimately detracts from the main story.

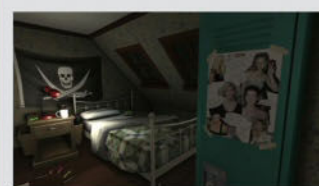
Better than...



Ether One

A touching story hidden behind clunky mechanics and glacial pacing. Firewatch is more deft in its mechanical execution.

Worse than...



Gone Home

Fullbright's first-person house-'em-up about a runaway teenager feels more assured and better paced in its overall arc, even if the scenery's not as nice.

2ND OPINION



"You'll want to lose more than just a summer in this vast and gorgeous world - Firewatch feels like an evolution of the type of tales we normally see in most games, even if it does go a little bit wonky in the middle. There are some seriously strong puns, too, which is always a bonus."
Ben Tyrer, Staff Writer, OPM

GM JUDGEMENT

80%



It won't set the world on fire, but there's a compelling character drama behind this mystery tale.
Phil Savage

GM Review

The Final Verdict!



Step into a sentry's cone of vision and it'll start to turn red. Step out sharpish, and he'll be a bit suspicious. Linger too long and you're rumbled.

Arbaaz can duck behind these green-fringed pillars to evade detection, hopping from spot to spot in time with enemy guard patrols.

The classic hay bale returns, and you'll once again be flinging yourself from dramatically-placed ledges whenever the opportunity arises.

Sneak up on a guard undetected and you'll be able to pickpocket the dozy blighter to refill your stock of stealth gadgetry.

Ammo full

Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC Publisher Ubisoft Developer Climax Studios ETA Out now Players 1

ASSASSIN'S CREED CHRONICLES: INDIA

The elephant in the room

Back in April, Ubisoft served up a refreshing little appetiser – a downloadable amuse-bouche that whetted our appetite for the next instalment in the trilogy. Given that ACC: China was an eminently capable game, and an intriguing introduction to the two-dimensional spin-off series, you might expect this follow-up to serve as an exercise in story development, mechanical evolution, and general refinement. Unfortunately it fails to deliver on any of these fronts.

The belated sequel doesn't get off to a strong start, introducing protagonist Arbaaz Mir by having players steer their lusty assassin towards a steamy midnight tryst. It's a juvenile start to a game that ostensibly takes heavyweight historical subject matter as its inspiration, and it positions him as some sort of nineteenth century Zack Morris – a cool jock with a quick wit and an eye for the ladies.

Indeed, Anyone hoping that these smaller-scale outings would provide an opportunity for Ubisoft to experiment with storytelling is in for a disappointment. Instead of an intriguing middle chapter, ACC: India presents yet another search for a mystical macguffin acted out by a cast of completely two-dimensional characters.

Arb' times

But whereas the first game in this planned trilogy compensated for its lack of narrative nuance with mechanical solidity and a certain sense of novelty, India's tweaks to the formula are largely negative. China took care to train players in the art of 2D assassination before setting them loose, for instance, but India assumes you're up to speed from the off, and a cursory tutorial omits any number of details that will prove crucial to your progression through, and enjoyment of, the wider game. Even those who played China to completion are likely to have a tough time recalling the muscle memory associated with a nine month old downloadable game.

And none of this is helped by a decidedly shaky difficulty curve, punctuated by regular, painful spikes. At its core, the stealth experience remains as thoughtful and compelling as ever, incentivising sneaky forethought and rewarding those who carefully avoid detection. But India is a less consistent game than its predecessor, as likely to frustrate as it is to delight.

The considered sneakery is broken up by occasional speed-running stages that see Arbaaz chasing down targets or escaping dangerous locales. The sense of weight to each animation ensures that success in these sections carries a certain sense of accomplishment, as you watch your nimble avatar leap and slide his way through crumbling ruins and enemy outposts. But even here, there's a misguided reliance on insta-fail objectives, so that rather than skirting through these stages by the skin of your teeth, you'll find yourself sitting through them time and again.

Certain sections are so exacting or poorly signposted that repeated failure is simply the only way to figure them out, encouraging a trial-and-error approach that quickly grates. It's unfortunate, given that China made for such a satisfactory entrée. We can only hope that the last in the trilogy, Russia, will present a tastier third course. ■

“YET ANOTHER SEARCH FOR A MYSTICAL MACGUFFIN ACTED OUT BY TWO-DIMENSIONAL CHARACTERS”

What's the best line in India's rather ropey script? The one it lifts wholesale from Joss Whedon's Serenity. See if you can spot it.

GM LOVES...

- ✓ The core stealth gameplay is satisfying and cerebral...

GM HATES...

- ✗ ...but it's introduced so poorly many will miss its finer points.
- ✗ Frequent insta-fail objectives are a frustrating chore.
- ✗ The narrative is cartoonishly simplistic and utterly dull.

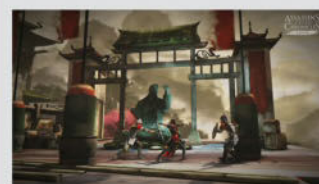
Better than...



The Saboteur

As historical stealth goes, India's at least a more engaging experience than this unconvincing tale of an Irishman saving the French Resistance.

Worse than...



Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China

India is less attractive, less welcoming, and less smoothly balanced than its immediate predecessor.

2ND OPINION



"After the sneaky joy that was Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China, this is a bitter disappointment.

Poorly designed levels, no combat opportunities, and a frustrating obsession with timed stealth stages mean even hardcore series fans need not apply for this hooded trip to India." Louise Blain, News Lead, GamesRadar+

GM JUDGEMENT

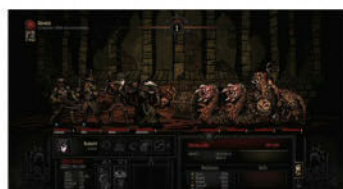
62%



Wastes the potential of its predecessor with its wonky difficulty curve and frequent frustrations. James Nouch



Just when you think enemies can't get any more disgusting, they'll surprise you with another set of legs and teeth.



Format PC **Publisher** Red Hook Studios **Developer** Red Hook Studios **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

DARKEST DUNGEON

The Little Book Of Caaaaaaaahlm

So it turns out that like life, dungeon crawling just isn't fair. There're no heroes in this roguelike-meets-management sim, just the lucky few who perhaps get to retire with only a couple of crippling psychological scars – some obsessive self-flagellation here, a bit of kleptomania there. (And those are just the ones you'll pick up in the tutorial.) Welcome to the mysterious and merciless Estate, where even victory feels like a kind of defeat.

Before we get into the eldritch horrors that lie in the darkness – yes, that's a tentacle, we're not just pleased to see you – it needs to be made clear that if there was ever a time to stop naming your team after your friends, this is well and truly it. Every quest you take with your (sometimes vocally unwilling) hirelings has the risk of permanent death, but don't worry, there's a graveyard where you can pay your respects.

Stress pest

Death comes in many forms in Darkest Dungeon. While your motley crew can fall in battle to the vile creatures and enormous bosses that lurk in the beautiful procedurally generated dungeons – jellified skeletons or pigmen with human-skin drums, anyone? – there's the constant problem of stress. As well as HP, everyone has a gauge showing the toll the adventure is having on their psyche. Reach 100 on the scale and they'll become afflicted, breaking down and developing a new unpleasant trait. Garner 200 and, well, they'll have a heart attack. Once you're used to the unfairness of it all it's a grimly satisfying stat to balance. Better torchlight in dungeons will alleviate the mental pain, but torches cost money, and less light can bring more rewards – there's more loot to be found in the dark. Betting your team's sanity and lives on the next shiny drop is an addictive risk.

The turn-based combat is a gory joy. Each of the slew of character types dispenses its own brand of justice – a

Man-At-Arms uses brute force, while an Occultist comes in handy for cursing your enemies and healing your team. Positioning is key, as each skill can only be used from certain positions, and optimising placement before battle is necessary for your chances of survival. The combat itself is slick and tense, as you hope that the stress doesn't finish off a key warrior before you can get to camp and dole out pep talks to bolster spirits.

It's not just battle or provisioning your runs into the various dungeons with torches and food that'll test your mettle. The rundown hamlet you're left in charge of is a balancing act of stats. Built around the Estate left to you by your ancestors, it must be restored to its former glory with heirlooms and gold you find in each dungeon crawl. The Blacksmith can be upgraded for better weaponry, Tavern extended, and Abbey expanded to offer better stress reduction. Yet each trip to pray or fortifying drink costs money. And here's the rub: it's possible to invest thousands of coin into one character, only for them to snuff it in what seemed like an easy jaunt into the Ruins, meaning a significant grind to get someone back to the same level. That said, there're hours of tension here, and while it might sound like masochism (an affliction one of your characters will likely get before the end), it's a glorious ride into hell. ■

“EVERYONE HAS A GAUGE SHOWING THE TOLL THE ADVENTURE IS TAKING ON THEIR PSYCHE”

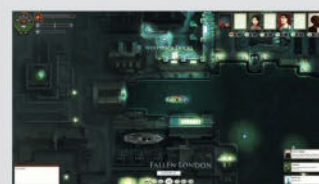
GM LOVES...

- ✓ Experimenting with different party combos is excellent fun.
- ✓ The world drips with atmosphere and black comedy.

GM HATES...

- ✗ Unpredictable dungeons can make death feel unfair.
- ✗ Losing a character after some bad luck means a serious grind.

Better than...



Sunless Sea

Darkest Dungeon is no less unforgiving but far more accessible than the atmospheric world on offer in this text-heavy adventure.

Worse than...



XCOM: Enemy Unknown

This strategy classic manages to add the risk of coming back without your teammates without a hellish grind necessary afterwards.

2ND OPINION



“Eldritch horror, unforgiving roguelike mechanics, and an art style that looks like it leapt right out of a Mike Mignola comic? It's like a checklist of my favourite things. All that, and a brilliant turn-based combat system to boot. Keep me saying ‘one more go’ well into the long, dark night.”
Robin Valentine, Production Editor

GM JUDGEMENT

82%



An unforgiving jaunt into Lovecraftian madness – and a deeply compelling dungeon crawler.
Louise Blain

GM Review

The Final Verdict!

NOW PLAYING



This month's biggest time sinks on Team GM



1 FINAL FANTASY EXPLORERS 3DS

This beautiful but shallow Monster Hunter-like has me pining for a real story. After grinding for Sephiroth's duds for hours, I switched to Tactics Ogre instead.

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor

2 LEGO MARVEL AVENGERS PS4

Another Lego game with everything I like! Combat's a blast and I'm loving the wide variety of characters you get to play with, as well as the witty riffs on the movies.

Sam Freeman, Art Editor



3 DRAGON'S DOGMA: DARK ARISEN PC

It's got a rough first few hours, but now that I'm in, I'm obsessed. Every quest feels like a real journey – exhausting, dangerous, and properly satisfying.

Robin Valentine, Production Editor

4 JUST CAUSE 3 PS4

When you do this for a living it can be hard to unplug your critical brain and just sit and enjoy a game. Not so with Rico's latest. Fun to the core.

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman, Editor



5 JUST CAUSE 3 PS4

I'm only a short way in to this epic but it's certainly got my attention – a true thrill ride of explosive action. Blowing up an enemy convoy on a bridge is a current highlight!

Sam Freeman, Art Editor

6 DARKEST DUNGEON PC

Sure, in XCOM 2 you may have to worry about keeping your soldiers alive, but at least you don't have to watch them go slowly insane...

Robin Valentine, Production Editor



OFFICE LUNCHTIME GAME OF THE MONTH:

STREET FIGHTER V PS4

We've been having fun with an (unfortunately) pre-review build and the hadoukens have been flying fast. Review next ish!



Expecting a nuanced depiction of a female character from the makers of Duke Nukem? She literally has a gun and two grenades styled into the shape of... well, you know.

Format PS4, XO, PC Publisher 3DRealms Developer Interceptor Studios ETA Out now Players 1

BOMBSHELL

'shell is for zeroes

Well, this is a novelty. We thought the days of videogaming avatars being so annoying that they cause blood clots to form in your temples from over-throbbing were long gone. Didn't Gex the Gecko kill this witticism spewing, dialogue-repeating bum-end of a game character trope stone dead?

"How many aliens does it take to change a lightbulb?" says Shelly 'Bombshell' Harrison, for the 11th time in the last 15

minutes. Tell us. No, don't delay. Tell us right now, Shelly. We really must know if the punchline to this joke has altered in any way since the last time you told it. Or the times before that. Go on. Tell us.

"None. They're all dead."

That noise, 3D Realms? That's the sound of a thousand videogame players groaning in unison at your bobbins joke, endlessly repeated.

We're being a tad unfair there, as turn the sound down and there's only a *mildly* rubbish shooter 'neath the quips. Bombshell's weapon set is a brusque hark back to the days of Duke Nukem, perhaps unsurprisingly given the

studio's lineage with the swaggering movie-quoter himself.

The game's souped-up take on a minigun is especially not-terrible to tote, with meaty thwacks accompanying each lead suppository delivered to a squishy alien. But then we see it's called the 'Maxigun', and is accompanied by another weapon called the 'Personal Missile System' (that's right, it's an acronym) and we're back to groaning.

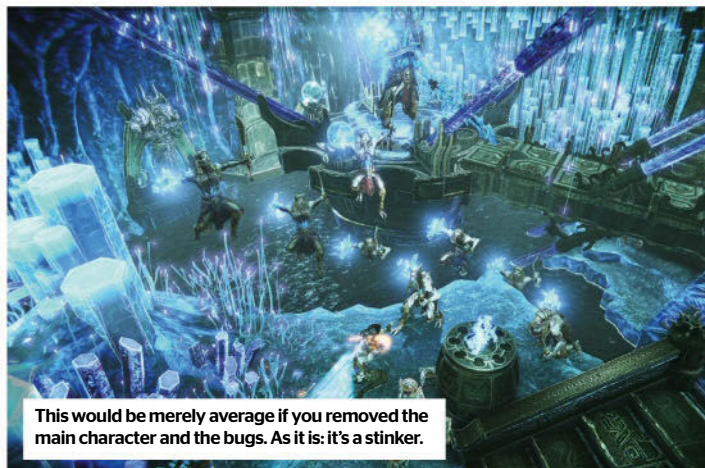
And what Bombshell really needs to attach to that hand-gun-arm of hers is some industrial strength bug spray. No, not just because there are alien insectoids exploding all over the shop. Both Shelly and her enemies get snagged on scenery constantly.

Then there's the world. It looks fairly pretty in places, eschewing the brown and grey of most dystopian futures to convey the tipped-over-toybox-full-of-action-figures feel. Characters are chunky, lighting is vivid and stark, and there's a pleasing sense of fun to the splashes of colour depicted, for example, as you delve into an alien planet slowly being sucked into a dying sun.

We could almost say that it's not entirely detestable...

"How many aliens does it take to change a lightbulb?" ■

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman



This would be merely average if you removed the main character and the bugs. As it is: it's a stinker.

43%



Format PC Pub NCSOFT Dev Team Bloodbath ETA Out now Players MMO

BLADE & SOUL

Nobody was kung fu fighting

MMOs can't just be good nowadays. And they can't just be innovative either. To dissuade gamers who've

already sunk a ba-jillion hours into a particular game-world of their choice to start from scratch in another requires something genuinely special.

Unfortunately, while this quirky number from South Korea does a number of things differently, and packs maybe the most satisfying PC MMO combat system we've seen, it just can't leap that hurdle.

Fighting in Blade & Soul is an active affair, all finger-tiring mouse clicks and timed combos, wrapped up in a vivid kung fu-fantasy palette. Character animation is especially appreciable. Those weaned on the stocky figures found in Warcraft and the stoic strafing of... well... any MMO really, will find themselves fawning fairly quickly over the ducking, dodging, and diving inspired by each key press. Blade & Souls seems to celebrate that you're playing it, rewarding even typical fighting moves with a blossom of visual flourish.

Traversal is also satisfying, taking the wire-inspired dashing about treetops

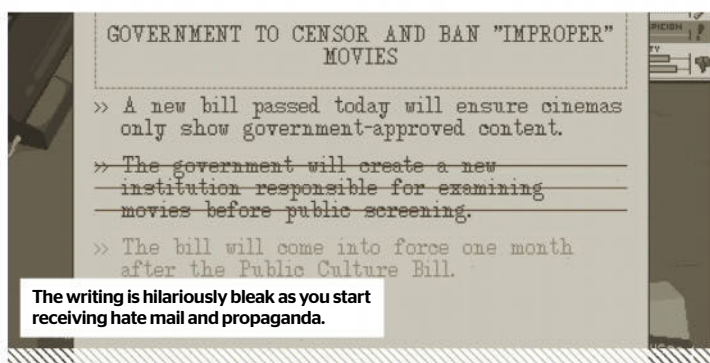


found in the films of Ang Lee and Zhang Yimou, and planting them on top of the - ahem - poop-textured and instance-filled landscape.

It's from here on that the mediocrity starts to seep in. Before long you're gathering numbers to fill gauges and pillaging from endlessly respawning enemies. The veneer of a decent revenge narrative is quickly scraped away post-prologue to reveal that you are, in fact, a sexed-up errand boy (or an oiled-up errand girl, given the game's creepy approach to female characters) destined to deliver pointless junk to NPCs, wait in turn to poke at baddies, and occasionally sigh through a breast-filled loading screen.

Time is a precious currency for the MMO-er. For all but the most curious, Blade & Soul won't be staking a claim on theirs. ■

58%



Format PC Publisher Double Zero One Zero Developer Double Zero One Zero ETA Out now Players 1

THE WESTPORT INDEPENDENT

More like Newspapers, Please

Lucas Pope's indie success Papers, Please has a lot to answer for. Not just the guilt you've still got for not letting an innocent man into Arstotzka, but for its clear influence on this smart noir-styled newspaper sim. Welcome to the editor's desk of a weekly paper where you not only have to tow the line of a totalitarian state, but also keep your team of journalists happy and not

erased like an inflammatory rebel-leaning sentence.

Your main duties are looking at the news stories of the day before selecting and editing them for publication. While there's plenty of evil cackling joy in towing the government line as you choose to censor its villainy, it's equally glorious to splash the grim truth across the cover. Yet juggling crime, industrial, celebrity, and societal news across four different



districts of the city requires serious journalistic skills. Sliders show the leanings of the reading public and, most importantly, how suspicious the government is of your activity. Tell the truth and risk a closure before your 12 weeks are up. Lie and risk losing half your staff and watch an evil dictatorship win. Balancing your inner justice scales is an enjoyably testing affair.

Yet, while it's worthy of multiple replays to see if you can single-handedly take down the regime in one of the many endings, the experience is short one. You'll be finished with your first run in under two hours, and while there's some snappy writing to uncover in repeat playthroughs, it would have been nicer to sit in the editor's chair a little longer. ■ Louise Blain

78%

HOT DOWNLOADS

The latest DLC and expansions explored



Although the Imperial overlords at EA are preparing to launch their paid DLC bombardment at any moment, the parade of freebies for Star Wars Battlefront continues unabated for now. This month a new multiplayer map has set down on the ice planet of Hoth, providing a frigid backdrop for games of Walker Assault, Supremacy, Fighter Squadron, and Turning Point. March, meanwhile, comes with the promise of a new map set on Endor - although it sounds as though our pleas for playable Ewoks have once again fallen on deaf ears.

But if cutesy woodland critters aren't your bag, perhaps gung-ho witches are more your speed. Super Smash Bros For Wii U and 3DS has added Bayonetta to the roster, and as ever Platinum's action antihero comes equipped with a quartet of pistols, two of which are attached to her shoes of course, as per proper firearm safety protocols. Meanwhile, Corrin, from the forthcoming Fire Emblem Fates, has also popped in for a scrap.

Speaking of people you've probably never heard of, that's exactly who Valve has entrusted to release the latest Half-Life 2 expansion. Prospekt is the product of one-man dev team Richard Seabrook, who has single-handedly crafted a sequel to Gearbox's 1999 expansion pack

Opposing Force. This somewhat belated side story casts you as US Marine Adrian Shephard, and has you assisting Gordon Freeman as he fights through the Combine stronghold that is Nova Prospekt prison. Expect improved AI, a bajillion turrets, and a return to Xen! Not bad for £7.50.

And if you thought a Half-Life 2 expansion was a little behind the times, you'll likely lose your bloommin' rag over our next recommendation. Id founder John Romero has released his first Doom level in more than 20 years, uploading a stage he's calling Tech Gone Bad to his Dropbox account for everyone to freely download and play. The frenetic level takes place in an advanced laboratory, and features the usual menagerie of deadly infernal beasts, as well as cracks to Hell all over the gosh-dang place. Grab your trusty double-barrelled and get blasting at this URL: <http://bit.ly/gmdoomlevel>



Master the biggest shooter in the galaxy



On sale now!

In print. On iOS. On Android

Follow this link: bit.ly/Ultimate-guide-sci-fi-shooters

GM
Comp
Win This!

POKÉMON



You'll be the talk of the gym with one of these glorious Red, Blue, or Yellow 2DS's in your mitts.



© 2016 Pokémon. © 1995–2016 Nintendo/Creatures Inc./GAME FREAK inc. Pokémon, Pokémon character names, Nintendo 3DS, Nintendo DS, Wii, and Wiiware are trademarks of Nintendo.

POCKET LEAGUE!

Win one of these three epic Pokémon 2DS bundles

Calling all Pokéfans! Have we got a giveaway for you this month? Yes. Yes, we have. In fact, we've got not just one but three limited-edition 2DS consoles, previously only available in Japan, to fire in the direction of three lucky readers. *Meowth, that's right!*

The three handhelds in question are far from your run-of-the-Beedrill machines. Oh yes. Each one comes with a colour co-ordinated see-through outer shell, to match the three original Pokémon games, Red, Blue, and the Pikachu-starring Yellow.

This magnificent Dugtrio of devices also each come with a sticker sheet for optimal 2DS customisation, as well as a Virtual Console edition of one of those three aforementioned 1996 hits.

Seaking more reasons to enter this fine compo? How about the knowledge that these digital versions of the genre-defining originals will enable, for the first time ever, wireless internet-based trading of the original Generation One Pokémon lineup? No more will you need to pine over the fact that you never did manage to bag yourself a Mew. No more tears shed over the Moltres that got away. No more Tangela-ing yourself up in a bunch of old-school link cables.

Stop lobbing your precious Pokéballs at our pages, though. In order to actually be in with a chance to win one of these awesome prizes and thus become the Victreebel of the ball, all you need to do is head to our competition page via the link in the green box over to the right and give us the answer to the following question by 31 March 2016:

Q Which of these is a real Pokémon type?

- A.** Fighting
- B.** Sleeping
- C.** Tweeting



HOW TO ENTER

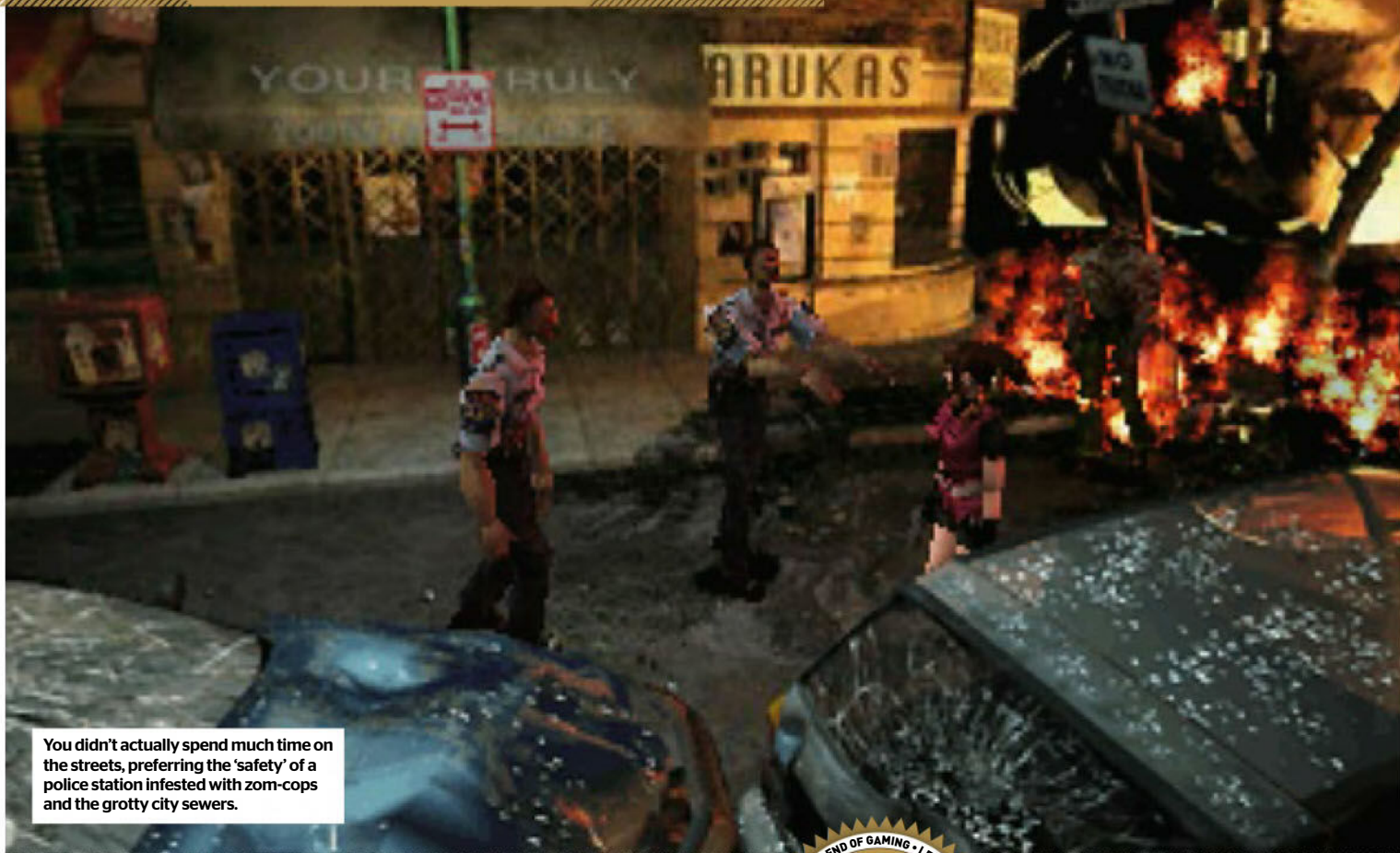
ONLINE

Make your way over to www.futurecomps.co.uk/gmpokemon to enter, where you can fill in your details and submit your answer.

Terms and conditions: By entering this Competition you are agreeing to receive details of future offers from Future Publishing Ltd. The closing date is 31 March 2016. By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules, which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futurepub.com/competition-rules. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.

RetroMaster

We ♥ Old Games!



You didn't actually spend much time on the streets, preferring the 'safety' of a police station infested with zom-cops and the grotty city sewers.

RESIDENT EVIL 2

Rot in the city, rot in the city tonight



The games industry has gotten much better at sequels over the years. Nowadays, probably because no triple-A game is greenlit without locking down a budget, deadline, and sales forecast, it's a nasty surprise when a sequel falls flat. Back in the day, it happened all the time as small teams went a bit doolally in the wake of a surprise hit. Mercifully, with *Resident Evil 2*, Capcom was the epitome of tact and calm (even though the sequel's development didn't exactly run without a hitch...).

The origins

The RE2 design and production team was like a roll call of the company's finest, including *Resi* godfather Shinji Mikami, arcade veteran and *Street Fighter* go-to guy Yoshiki Okamoto, and eventual *Clover* and *Platinum* high-roller Hideki Kamiya.

Even so, it would have been easy to miscalculate the follow-up to a wild card such as *Resident Evil*. In the earliest pitch for a sequel we'd have revisited the

mansion from the original game (or what was left of it) with a new cast of characters, which Capcom eventually and correctly noted was a faintly crap idea.

So the storyline settled down squarely within Raccoon City, but it still took a while for everything we now know to fall into place. Claire Redfield didn't exist; the lifeless locations were instead explored by her doomed-to-obscure predecessor, Elza Walker. Still the whole thing chugged along, and this "Resident Evil 1.5" was more than half done before the Capcom Quality Hatchet came whistling down. At this point, scriptwriter Noboru Sugimura was brought in to help rethink the scenarios, sharpen the hooks, and ensure nothing in the game would add fuel to RE1's unfortunate reputation for dialogue horror.

The legend

So did RE2 in its final form give us everything we wanted? Absolutely. It wasn't so much that the mechanics had been totally modernised, because they hadn't: it was all about recapturing the same dark magic while widening the scope. Ammo and inventory space

Developer Capcom
Publisher Capcom
Released 1998
Format PC, GameCube, Dreamcast, N64, PS1
Get it PlayStation Store

remained as tightly squeezed as your imperilled buttock muscles, and the penalty for failure was as graphically gory as ever. But RE2 gave us a whole, believable city sinking into the end times, rather than a bundle of trained agents pinballing around an unsettling mansion. The cutscenes were astonishingly cinematic for a game of its time, and as we didn't know any better we barely noticed that they were all acted out by mad, glassy-eyed puppet people.

Like the original, RE2 fielded a pair of playable characters. This time we got debutantes Leon Kennedy and Claire Redfield, with tales that were unique and

intertwining, and each not only picked up a tagalong companion (marking Ada Wong's first appearance) but could follow a distinct A or B campaign. Four games in one, splashed across two discs! With three unlockable minigames! To cap it all off you were guaranteed frequent run-ins with a new trenchcoat-rocking 'Mr X' Tyrant and ever-mutating fruitcake scientist William Birkin, who in his final form made the original Tyrant look like Tyra Banks. *Resident Evil 2*, kids: meatier than a hippopotamus baguette, and twice as hazardous to underestimate.

The legacy

Naturally, you can trace a good portion of the *Resi* series' pedigree back to the original game. But while a shoddy sequel can kill a franchise's potential faster than compulsory Kinect controls, RE2 had the

"AMMO AND INVENTORY SPACE AS TIGHTLY SQUEEZED AS YOUR IMPERILLED BUTTOCK MUSCLES"



Leon and Claire, looking good in a buffalo stance. Or not. We're unsure.



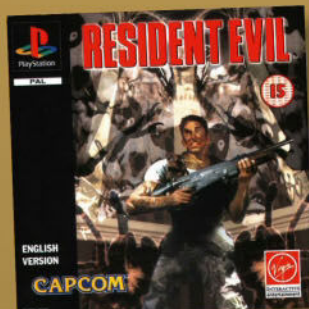
Corrupt police chief Brian Irons! Still the best-named Resi character.

opposite effect: its quality only confirmed that Capcom's not-at-all-reassuring vision of life after death definitely had legs. And so the Resident Evil multimedia empire swung into action with all the momentum of Nemesis straddling a wrecking ball, Miley Cyrus-style – and you have to admit, that's a powerful image.

It's a great joy to many that after years of fan harassment, Capcom is finally rustling up a current-gen retread of Leon and Claire's great urban misadventure. It'll sit nicely between the action-driven bombast of the most recent numbered entries, and throwbacks of the Revelations strain. Hopefully it'll also highlight what's leaked out of the series in recent years – the intensity of experiences such as PT and a wild herd of modern indie dread-fests. After all, it's not as if we'll shrivel up and die for want of generic third-person monster-shooters. But the survival horror foundations on which Resi set down its bleak houses, compromised cop shops, and blood-spattered Umbrella facilities still offer plenty of room for new builds. We'd hate to see that go undeveloped. ■

Series Spotlight

The numbers of the beasts



1 Resident Evil

(PC, PS1, Saturn – 1996)

Yes, it was all thoroughly scripted, with fixed camera angles bringing out the festering best in those pre-rendered backgrounds and jump scares that only worked once, but they *did* work. Also a bit short on unlockables and bonus modes, but it scored where it mattered – virtually every feature introduced here would become Resi standard. Gratifyingly, Capcom still seems as reverent about this first instalment as we all were at the time.



2 Resident Evil 3: Nemesis

(PC, GameCube, Dreamcast, PS1 – 1999)

RE2 was a tough act to follow, but RE3 did it by building on two of its best ideas: survival in an infected city, and the recurring attentions of a big stalky lunatic. Framing the events of RE2 but from the viewpoint of original STARS team member Jill Valentine, it offered a satisfying continuation of RE1's story in a branching path format, maintaining the sinister sanctity of Resi's little bubble universe.



3 Resident Evil 4

(PC, Wii, GameCube, PS2 – 2005)

A lot happened between the third and fourth core games, including Code: Veronica on Dreamcast in 2000 and RE Zero on GameCube in 2002. RE4 spent most of that time being scrapped and restarted until almost all its old trappings were shorn away, leaving a sleek beast with bang-up-to-date mechanics and horrifying foes. Enthusiastic amateur hairdresser Chainsaw Man still haunts our dreams.



4 Resident Evil 5

(PC, PS3, 360 – 2009)

Bulbous Chris Redfield punching a boulder out of his way (as Sheva wasted all the ammo) will likely be the perception that RE5 takes to its dusty, sun-baked grave. This was the first time that a mainline Resi game went a bit awry. While by no means unpolished or unplayable, its "action horror" leanings left purists moaning and gnashing their teeth, their hunger for sweet human flesh – sorry, we mean true survival horror – unsatisfied.



5 Resident Evil 6

(PC, PS3, 360 – 2012)

Then came RE6, doing its utmost to include the kitchen sink, everything in the cupboard under the kitchen sink, and the draining board. Seven characters in four campaigns, a whole world in peril, zombies and non-zombies, stealth, explosions, and running – it did bring a sense of desperation, but not one that felt intentional. A shame, as behind the madly uneven gameplay there was a sense of reaching back to many of the ambitions of good old RE2.

SIX OF THE BEST... UNDEAD SLAYERS

What are you doing out of your graves? Come on, back you go...

Sadly, if myth, legend, and pop culture have taught us anything about the walking dead, it's that they never have a helpful or practical reason for returning to roam the earth again, such as petitioning the council to install guard rails on that cliff they tripped and fell off. No, they always come back just to eat our faces. Which makes them an impolite bunch of yobs who need sorting out. Most heroes will butt heads with the restless dead at some stage - see Mario's tangles with Dry Bones, Lara's Egyptian mummy issues, or Link's mentally scarring run-ins with Redeads - but games have provided us with protagonists particularly well-equipped and inclined to function in this area. The zombie-magnet members of Resi's STARS, RPD, and BSAA teams are just the advance guard... ■

AYA

Oniechanbara
(PS2 - 2004)

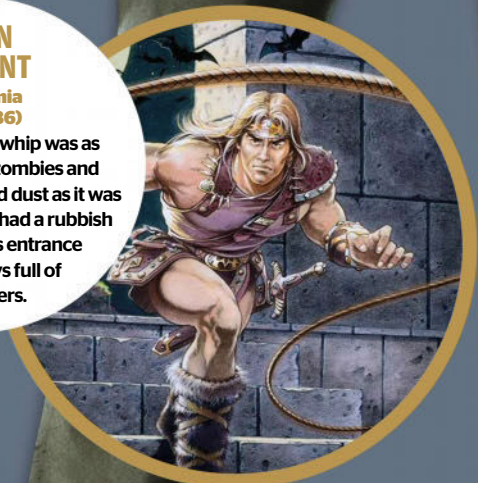
Like Juliet Starling, bikini girl Aya sails a little too close to titillation over practicality. What saves the day are the Baneful Blood powers and katana evisceration skills that put her alongside the best in the corpse-dropping business.



SIMON BELMONT

Castlevania
(NES - 1986)

The Vampire Killer whip was as good at reducing zombies and skeletons to mush and dust as it was at ensuring Dracula had a rubbish day. Handy, as his entrance hall was always full of the blighters.



MAXIMO

Maximo
(PS2 - 2001)

As the first level enemies of predecessor Ghosts 'n' Goblins ran riot through an entire game, noble Maximo faced the rancid mob with just his sword, shield, and some novelty pants. Well, and a favour or two from the Grim Reaper.





AGENT G

The House Of The Dead
(Arcade - 1996)

Smart-casual mystery man G began as merely Player 2 to Thomas Rogan's Player 1, but a role in every game lifted him to zombie-popping prominence. Largely thanks to G, series loons Curien and Goldman are no more. Probably.

FRANK WEST

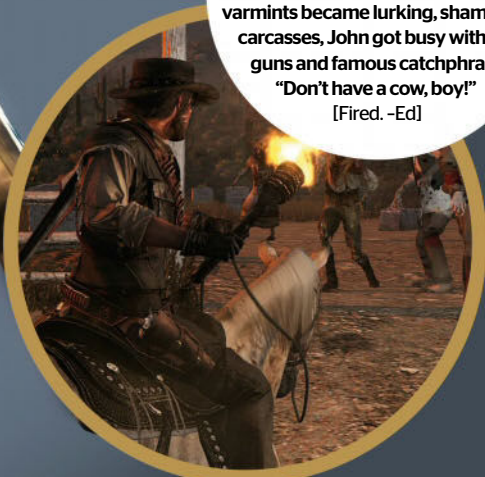
Dead Rising
(Xbox 360 - 2006)

Everyone prefers grumpy, rumpled hack Frank to Dead Rising 2's Chuck or Wossname from number three. Rarely do we throw a spanner (and a lawnmower) into the works of the zombie apocalypse with such glee.

JOHN MARSTON

Red Dead Redemption
(PS3, 360 - 2010)

When his world fell into an Undead Nightmare and all the dirty rotten varmints became lurking, shambling carcasses, John got busy with his guns and famous catchphrase "Don't have a cow, boy!"
[Fired. -Ed]



Grab Bag

Retro gems from every era



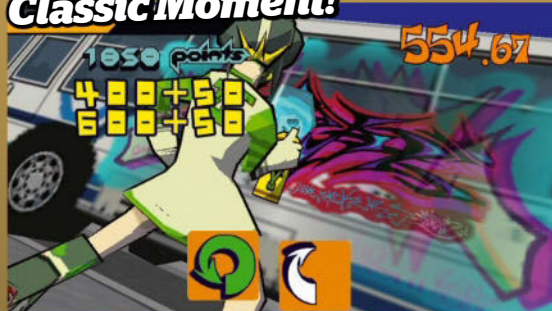
Awesome Boss!



Marvel vs. Capcom

Format Dreamcast, PS1, Arcade **Developer** Capcom **Released** 1998
Enjoy fighting Apocalypse in previous Vs games, did you? Well, chuckled Capcom, here's a treat! Out rolled Onslaught, a mile-high mongrel of Bad Professor X and Magneto, adding teleportation and flight to Apocalypse's toolbox of energy bolts, ramming attacks, and an inconveniently massive final form. Who does that leave? Galactus? Surely they'd never... Oh.

Classic Moment!



Jet Set Radio

Format Dreamcast **Developer** Smilebit **Released** 2000
There was a lot to love about Sega's cel-shaded skate opera, from its achingly trendy soundtrack to the joy of claiming whole districts of Tokyo-to by spraying tags onto shop fronts, moving buses, and, occasionally, people. The ability to deface the city with your own custom-designed graffiti (or comedy pics nicked from the internet) was just the anarchic cherry on top.

Remake Request!



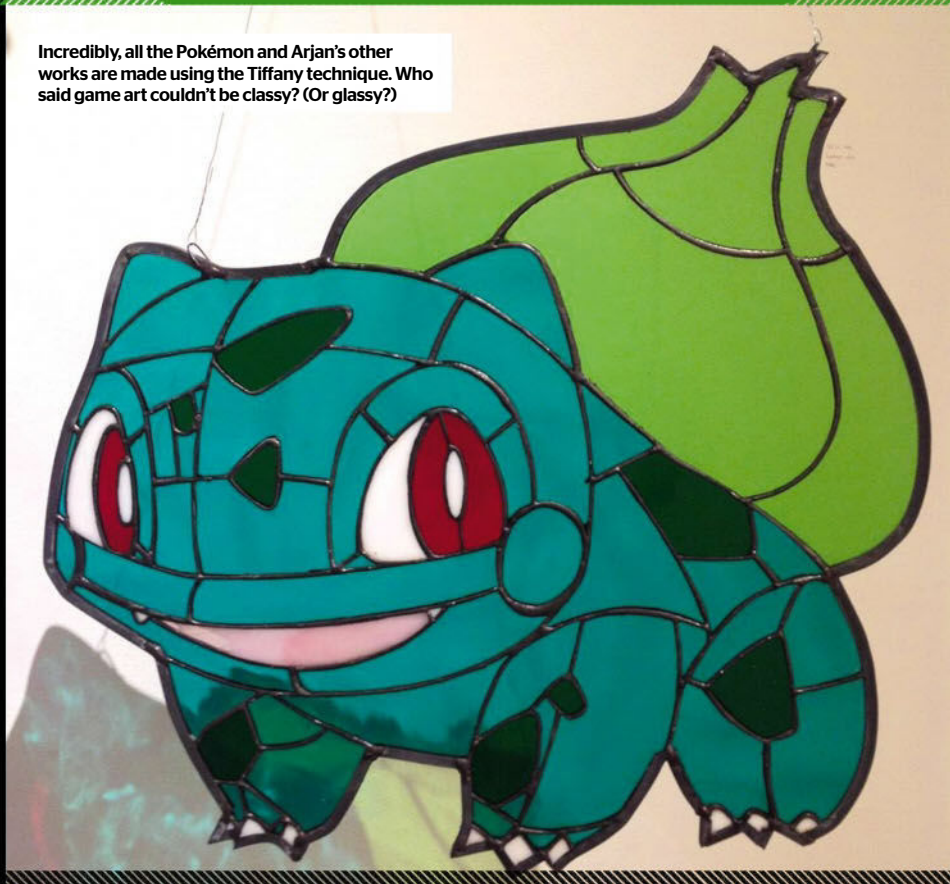
Hunter's Moon

Format C64 **Developer** Thalamus **Released** 1987
Thalamus first made a name for itself with horizontal shmups such as Sanxion and Delta. This tricky devil here? Not so easily pigeonholed. Picture Uridium as an eight-way puzzle-shooter, with 128 levels of star cells secreted in eerie space hives. Now bolster those basics with new-gen visuals and Geometry Wars particle effects, and we'd be over the... we'd be very happy.

CultureMaster

The outer regions of gaming

Incredibly, all the Pokémon and Arjan's other works are made using the Tiffany technique. Who said game art couldn't be classy? (Or glassy?)



SAVING THE VERY BEST FOR GLASS

This is artistic smashables like you've never seen them before. We catch up with artist **Arjan Boeve** and find out how he got his glass into gear

Life's good when you have a goal. Especially when that goal is to frame the first 151 Pokémon in lead and glass. Meet Arjan Boeve from Normandy, France. The self-styled Stained Glass Geek on Instagram, Boeve is a 29-year-old motion designer who crafts beautiful versions of our gaming heroes in glass.

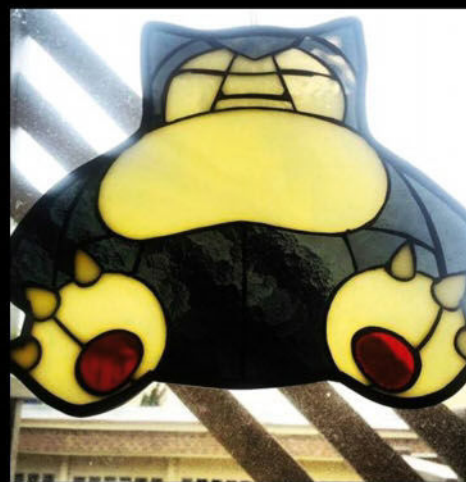
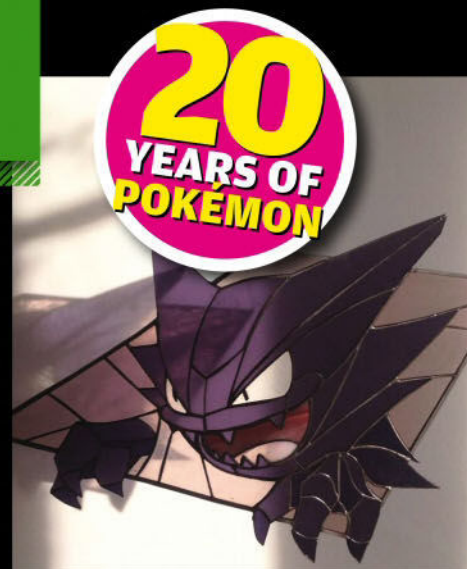
"I was starting to get fed up with my daily routines as a motion designer and I needed another creative outlet," Arjan explains when we ask him how he got into this rather unique job. "Also, sitting behind my desk the whole day long started to hurt my back, so I was looking for a new balance of doing motion design and something else, hopefully stained glass. When I moved to Normandy I finally had the space to set up shop. I invested a little in tools and material and learned just by doing it actually." Here we were just taking a painkiller when our back hurt. "For me it's mainly a combination of two passions. I like the old crafts and I really enjoy playing games," he reveals. "So the ideas come quite naturally. It all started with the mushroom. I really wanted to start with a Mario

power-up series. They're not that big, and by doing those I could learn the basic principles of creating glasswork."

The process involved is complex as each piece of glass has to be carefully shaped and then combined, and Arjan is working on bigger and bigger projects. "I create a design as a vector file, which allows me to print it as often as needed and in any size I'd like," he explains. "Then it's cutting the glass into the proper pieces like a jigsaw puzzle. Once all the pieces are shaped and their edges are sanded, I wrap them in copper foil."

Solder on

What's more, if you thought stained glass was all the same, you'd be very wrong. Arjan uses a very specific method that's been in development since 1878, and you might just have heard of it. "The technique is called Tiffany, after the inventor," he explains enthusiastically. "He was a member of the Tiffany family in New York. Remember Breakfast At Tiffany's? The story goes that Louis Comfort Tiffany was from a very wealthy family, doing interior design when he visited London and he came back amazed by old glass pieces he'd seen in the Victoria And Albert Museum. So, he started a production



Arjan has a Patreon page where people can support his mission to create all of the Pokémon in glass.

line of glass and a specifically glass workshop. This technique is still used the same way, with the same glass as it always was - only, in my scenario, with today's icons and heroes." Who needs a Tiffany lamp when Boeve can craft you a Stormtrooper or classy blue shell for your living room?

How long a piece takes him varies for each, but surprisingly it's a faster job than it looks. We're talking days, not weeks, as Boeve meticulously constructs each panel before securing them together. "It really depends on the size, number of pieces and complexity of the design," says Arjan. "It took me two days to do the Charmander, and another day to do the window that fits around him. The Scyther took me most of a week."

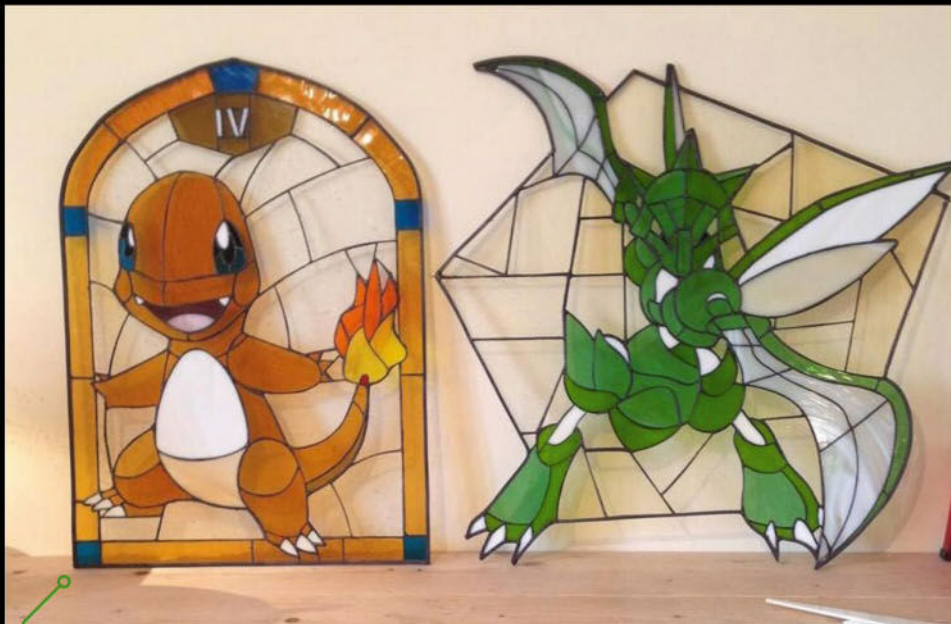
"IT COMBINES TWO PASSIONS: CRAFTS AND GAMES. THE IDEAS COME NATURALLY"



His most requested item is Zelda hearts. Why are gamers the best lovers? We press all the right buttons!



He started out with more simplistic Mario power-ups before moving on to more complex designs.



Just look at that Charmander's flame! We're blown away by the intricate detail of these two beautiful designs - and each only took Arjan a few days to put together. Now we just need some kind of Pokémon church to put them in...



Pokémon are Arjan's passion and his works already include Pikachu, Bulbasaur, Ghostly, and Snorlax, but he wants more. Realistically, he knows he'll probably be well into his thirties before he manages it, but he has his heart set on the complete Generation One Pokédex. "I hope one day to have created all Pokémon in stained glass," he confirms. "Only the first 150 would already be amazing! I think I'll need seven or eight years to create them all. I believe I'm almost at 2%."

Just smashing

Arjan already has a mighty impressive catalogue of characters under his belt, but obviously he still wants more, and he's hoping for some specific requests, with a definite wish list of his own favourites. "One character I really hope to do someday is Link from The Wind Waker," he says. "It is maybe a bit obvious, but those stained glass window designs? I'd love to create them in real glass someday. And then there is Midna from Twilight Princess. She deserves a proper window too. What a great character

she is! Oh, and Buzz Lightyear. I've actually had his design ready from day one."

It might be choice tougher than a Sandshrew's back to make, but Arjan already knows that his favourite piece so far is one he's currently constructing. Clue: It would be perfect for one of those many smashed windows in your settlement in Sanctuary Hills. "It isn't finished yet but I'm working on a very big Vault Boy from Fallout 4," Arjan confirms. "I can't wait to see that one finished. Other than that I'm really pleased with how the Haunter- and Scyther-inspired glass pieces have turned out. I feel that their size really makes them more alive."

Arjan gets dozens of requests on his Etsy store but it turns out we game players are just a bunch of romantics at heart: "The most requested piece is the Zelda heart," he says. "The funniest request I've had is two Murlocs holding hands, standing in a heart shape as a Valentine's Day gift." Beautiful designs and romantic customers? From where we're standing, the glass is half full. ■

See this!

Think Arjan's a glass act? You'll find more of his amazing creations on his Instagram page: <http://bit.ly/gmglass>



GLOBAL MASTER

Games events to help you plan your 2016



CALIFORNIA DREAMING

Head to San Diego Comic Con on 21-24 July for the biggest comic con in the world. Cosplay, games, films, TV and comics combine to deliver the ultimate convention experience, where it's weird *not* to be dressed up as your favourite character: <http://bit.ly/gmsandiegocc>

GO EAST

If you don't mind the 11-hour flight, The Tokyo Game Show is a four-day extravaganza of gaming glory. Publishers and developers show off their latest games, and there's a merchandise section so big that your wallet should already be very afraid. It runs from 15 to 18 September. Find more at: <http://bit.ly/gmtokyogameshow>

DEUTSCH ANGLE

Thankfully a little closer to home, Cologne's Gamescom is a veritable Christmas for gamers, with hands-on access to all the big winter releases. We've seen the queues, though, so bring a folding chair. The madness runs 18-21 August. More at: <http://bit.ly/gmgamescom>



CheatMaster

The **Biggest Games** Taken Apart!



Format PC Publisher 2K Games Developer Firaxis ETA Out now

XCOM 2 EXPOSED

The battlefield strategies you need for Ironman Commander and beyond

1 XCOM give it to ya

The key to the higher difficulties is to never give the game a fair fight. If a round of combat consists of you and your enemies both hiding in cover, taking potshots across open ground until one of you scores a hit, then you're really just rolling dice – and they're weighted in the aliens' favour. You've got to play dirty to succeed, and your ultimate goal shouldn't be to survive their attacks, it should be to not get shot at in the first place. Not always achievable, but possible more often than you'd expect, as long as you're taking advantage of every tool and tactic at your disposal.

2 Aim for success

The simplest way of making sure your foes never get a shot in is to kill them first, and that means maximising your chance to hit and damage. Use grenades to destroy cover, leaving them exposed. Flank them with one soldier and set Overwatch with another, so that if they try to move out of danger, they'll take a hit while they're in the open. Take high ground for an elevation bonus to accuracy.

4 Cover love

Of course, there will be times when suffering an alien salvo is unavoidable – at that point, it's up to you to make sure your troops are nearly impossible to hit. Always be in high cover, and don't underestimate the power of the Hunker Down action. It handily doubles your cover bonus, which in high cover makes a soldier high-on invulnerable – always a better option than taking a low-percentage shot, or going into Overwatch against foes with no reason to move. A Gremlin defence bonus never hurts either. Keep in mind, however, that the aliens know how likely they are to hit someone, and will often go for whoever they've got most chance of hurting. Make sure you've got no weak links.

5 Stock check

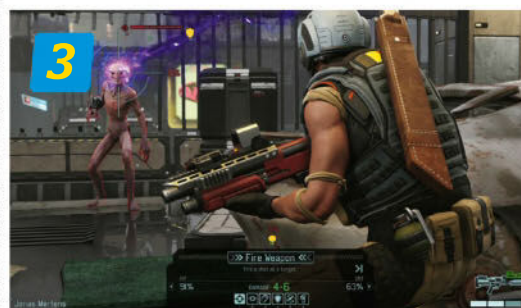
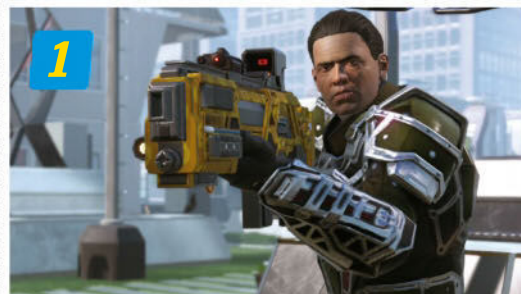
If an enemy's in Overwatch and one of your soldiers needs to move, don't worry – their vigilant state will be cancelled if they take any damage. If you can't hit them with rifles then grenades will do the trick, but your best option is a weapon upgraded with a stock. Stocks guarantee you'll do one damage even if you miss, and that single point of hurt is enough to cancel an alien's Overwatch state.

3 Side effect

A flanking shot not only ignores cover, making you far more likely to hit, but also massively boosts your critical chance. You should always be looking for an opportunity to flank – and even if you can't, the more side-on to an enemy you can get, the more of a Good Angle bonus you'll get to your accuracy. Make sure, however, that your tactical moves don't leave your troops vulnerable to being flanked themselves.

6 Level playing field

The lives and health of your troops should almost always take priority, even if it results in missing some loot or failing a mission entirely. Levelled up soldiers are an invaluable resource that only become more vital as you progress through the campaign. If they're injured, they're on the bench instead of gaining experience in further missions, and could even become Shaken, taking a hit to their Willpower that isn't easy to set right. If they die, you're back to square one with a new recruit. Many missions will let you summon the Skyraider for an early escape – if you see things turning sour in time to do something about it, this can be a great option. In evac missions, however, it's not possible, and you'll need to keep a careful eye on how much time you've got left. Run out with soldiers still on the field, and they'll be lost, so sometimes your best bet is just legging it to the extraction zone, VIP be damned.



7 Stunning results

Good XCOM 2 tactics minimise the effect of randomness on combat, but the possibility always exists that bad luck will simply stitch you up. Whenever there's chance involved, no matter how seemingly certain the outcome, make sure you've got a plan B in case it all goes wrong. A Grenadier with a flashbang or two is always handy – the stun blast will leave aliens reeling, buying you a couple of turns of breathing room.



GM Subscribe

Never Miss An Issue!



CHOOSE YOUR PACKAGE

For all your multiformat needs, subscribe today to the world's most dedicated gaming mag. We have three options to choose from...

PRINT

**Save
18%**



**6 MONTHLY
SUBSCRIPTION**

£26.50

- It costs less than buying it in the shops!
- There'll be free stuff every issue!
- Plus get two Star Wars POP! Vinyl figures!

DIGITAL

**Save
28%**



**6 MONTHLY
SUBSCRIPTION**

£14.00

- The cheapest way to get your GM!
- Every issue is packed with trailers and videos!
- Download instantly on the day of release!
- You never have to leave the house!

PRINT & DIGITAL

**Save
35%**



**6 MONTHLY
SUBSCRIPTION**

£33.50

- The best value GM package!
- Every print issue delivered to you!
- Free gifts with every magazine!
- A digital copy for iOS or Android!
- New trailers and videos each month!
- Get two Star Wars POP! Vinyl figures!

**SPECIAL
OFFER**

SUBSCRIBE

**GET A POP! VINYL DARTH VADER AND
STORMTROOPER WHEN YOU START
A PRINT OR PRINT +
DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION**



Straight from the Death Star and into your heart, these iconic figures are a great start, or addition, to your Pop! Vinyl collection.

**SUBSCRIBE
TO GAMESMASTER TODAY**

GO ONLINE: MYFAVOURITEMAGAZINES.CO.UK/GMSUBS

Gift is available to new UK print subscribers and print + digital subscribers paying by monthly Direct Debit only. Please allow up to 30 days for delivery of your gift. Gift is subject to availability. In the event of stocks becoming exhausted, we reserve the right to replace with items of a similar value. Prices and savings quoted are compared to buying full priced UK print and digital issues. You will receive 13 issues in a year. If you are dissatisfied in any way you can write to us at Future Publishing Ltd, 3 Queensbridge, The Lakes, Northampton, NN 4 7BF, United Kingdom to cancel your subscription at any time and we will refund you for all un-mailed issues. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. For full terms and conditions please visit: myfavm.ag/magterms. Offer ends 24/03/2016.

DID YOU MISS OUR EPIC 300TH ISSUE?

Download the digital magazine now!



Find it in the GamesMaster magazine app



NEXT MONTH...

GamesMaster 302

ON SALE 24 MARCH

DARK SOULS III™

We take the series swansong for the ultimate final playtest before launch

Also next issue...

Reviewed: Street Fighter V, Far Cry Primal
+ The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess HD

Previewed: Horizon: Zero Dawn, Overwatch
+ Total War: Warhammer

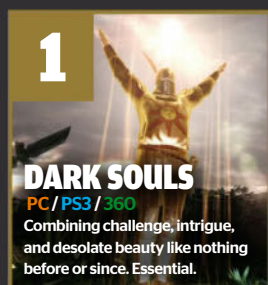
And we celebrate 20 years of Resident Evil in style!

...plus loads more!

GAME GUIDE



Welcome to GM's carefully collated list of the most essential gaming experiences you can undertake right now. If even one of the 50 games on here has passed you by, get a shift on post-haste



1

DARK SOULS

PC / PS3 / 360

Combining challenge, intrigue, and desolate beauty like nothing before or since. Essential.



2

THE LAST OF US

PS4 / PS3

Naughty Dog brings all of its strengths to the fore, fusing engaging gameplay with stunning storytelling.



3

THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

PS4 / XO / PC

An epic proposition that truly lives up to its promise. Engaging, mature, and unbelievably vast.

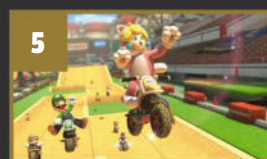


4

GRAND THEFT AUTO V

PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360

The most comprehensive sandbox going, full of wonderful distractions and typical Rockstar humour.



5

MARIO KART 8

Wii U

Reinvention is what Ninty does best, and nowhere is that more apparent than in this joyous karter reborn.

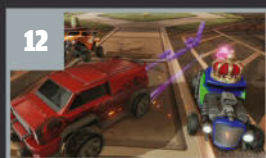


11

SUPER MARIO MAKER

Wii U

The most brilliantly accessible level creation game around, dripping with Nintendo's slick signature style.

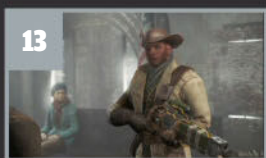


12

ROCKET LEAGUE

PS4 / XO / PC

2015's surprise hit combines football and motors to create an amazingly universal multiplayer experience.



13

FALLOUT 4

PS4 / XO / PC

A hundred little improvements over its predecessor make this trip to the wasteland one worth booking.



14

SPLATOON

Wii U

Injects more fun and colour into the online shooter genre than we would've thought possible.

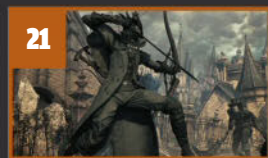


15

SPELUNKY

PS4 / PC / PS3 / 360 / PS Vita

Tight, brutally challenging, and endlessly replayable - this is the defining action roguelike.



21

BLOODBORNE

PS4



22

DISHONORED

PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360



23

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

XO



24

ROCK BAND 4

PS4 / XO



25

FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING

3DS



31

BATTLEFIELD 4

PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360



32

ELITE DANGEROUS

XO / PC



33

ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF

3DS



34

TRIALS FUSION

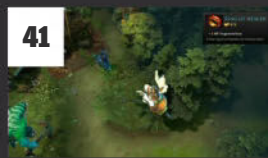
PS4 / XO / PC / 360



35

SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

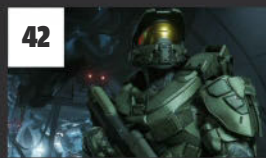
Wii U



41

DOTA 2

PC



42

HALO 5: GUARDIANS

XO



43

HEROES OF THE STORM

PC



44

LUIGI'S MANSION 2: DARK MOON

3DS



45

FTL: FASTER THAN LIGHT

PC / Mobile

FORMAT BUYER'S GUIDE

Just bought a spanking new console? Configured a new rig? Or perhaps you've a new handheld ready to go? Whichever machine you've got, GM is here to ensure you're clued in on the top exclusives



- 1 THE LAST OF US REMASTERED
- 2 JOURNEY
- 3 TOWERFALL ASCENSION
- 4 BLOODBORNE
- 5 RESOGUN



- 1 HALO 5: GUARDIANS
- 2 KALIMBA
- 3 FORZA HORIZON 2
- 4 SUNSET OVERDRIVE
- 5 ORI & THE BLIND FOREST



- 1 MARIO KART 8
- 2 SUPER MARIO MAKER
- 3 SPLATOON
- 4 BAYONETTA 2
- 5 SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

Guilty Pleasure

Team GM comes clean on the games it secretly plays when no-one's watching...



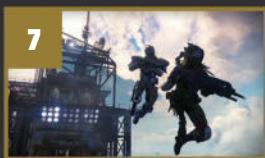
This month, Robin admits his shameful enjoyment of **Bound By Flame**

Ok, it's a janky The Witcher 2 rip-off. I can't deny it. Awkward fights, awful dialogue, the visuals of an iOS port of Dragon Age 2. But damn it, there's just something about it I love. Its idiosyncracies, from the explosives-heavy combat to the customisable armour pieces, make it feel genuinely unique, and the story it tells, a grim tale of demonic possession and icy armageddon, is gleefully bleak. Plus every character is such an insufferable jerk (main character Vulcan chief among them) that you can't help but chuckle. Flame on, I say.



6 JOURNEY

PS4 / PS3
This intensely emotional trip through a strange, beautiful world is a truly spellbinding display of games as art.



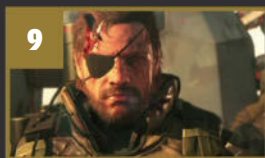
7 DESTINY: THE TAKEN KING

PS4 / X0 / PS3 / 360
One year and three chunks of DLC later and Bungie has finally made Destiny the shooter-RPG it was meant to be.



8 TOWERFALL ASCENSION

PS4 / PC / PS Vita
Still nothing on current-gen has come close to matching the multiplayer thrills found in this twitchy battler.



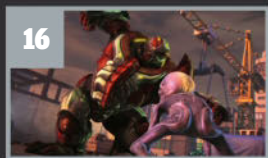
9 METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM MENACE

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360
Hideo's last hurrah brings open-world action to the revered series.



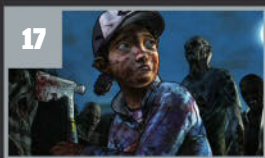
10 HER STORY

PC / Mobile
An engrossing mystery that makes us believe in FMV again. Utterly, wonderfully unique.



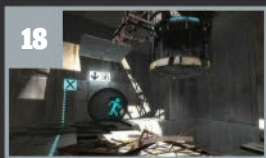
16 XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

PC / PS3 / 360 / Mobile
Turn-based strategy gold that truly makes you care about your soldiers - then kills them off.



17 THE WALKING DEAD

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360 / PS Vita / Mobile
Some of the finest storytelling that gaming has to offer.



18 PORTAL 2

PC / PS3 / 360
Effortlessly combines pitch-perfect puzzling with perhaps gaming's best ever comedy writing.



19 GUILD WARS 2: HEART OF THORNS

PC
Still the benchmark for PC MMOs, and the expansion is a worthy upgrade.



20 HOTLINE MIAMI

PS4 / PC / PS3 / PS Vita / Mobile
An ultra-violent neon nightmare of blood, drugs, and sharp white suits. So fast-paced you'll get whiplash.



26 BAYONETTA 2

Wii U



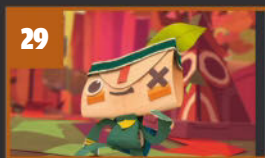
27 POKÉMON X & Y

3DS



28 MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF MORDOR

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360



29 TEARAWAY

PS Vita



30 FAR CRY 4

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360



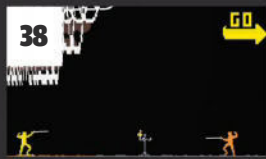
36 RESOGUN

PS4 / PS3 / PS Vita



37 ALIEN ISOLATION

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360



38 NIDHOGG

PS4 / PC / PS Vita



39 TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS

PS4 / X0 / PC / PS3 / 360 / Mobile



40 UNCHARTED: THE NATHAN DRAKE COLLECTION

PS4



46 BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

PS4 / X0 / PC



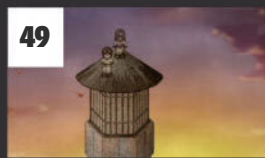
47 80 DAYS

PC / Mobile



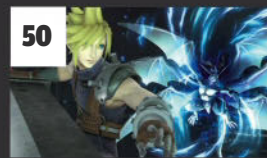
48 ULTRA STREET FIGHTER IV

PS4 / PC / PS3 / 360



49 TO THE MOON

PC



50 SUPER SMASH BROS FOR WII U

Wii U

PC

1 HER STORY

2 GUILD WARS 2

3 DOTA 2

4 TOTAL WAR: ATTILA

5 KERBAL SPACE PROGRAM

3DS

1 FIRE EMBLEM AWAKENING

2 POKEMON X & Y

3 ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF

4 LUIGI'S MANSION 2: DARK MOON

5 MONSTER HUNTER 4 ULTIMATE

PS VITA

1 TEARAWAY

2 PERSONA 4 GOLDEN

3 VELOCITY 2X

4 ZERO ESCAPE: VIRTUE'S LAST REWARD

5 GRAVITY RUSH

iOS

1 80 DAYS

2 FTL: FASTER THAN LIGHT

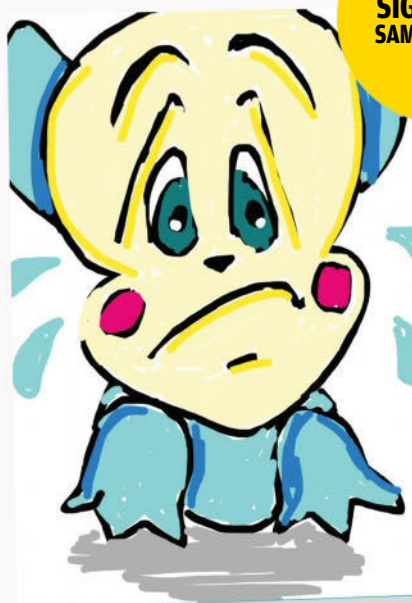
3 SORCERY 3

4 HEARTHSTONE: HEROES OF WARCRAFT

5 PAPERS, PLEASE

THE GRAND GAMESMASTER ART GALLERY

As we doff our caps in the direction of the venerable Pokémon, and its 20 year reign as king of critter-collecting, we've gotten out our crayons and had a go at creating our own monsters. The takeaway? We really need to stick to our day jobs...



SIGH-MON
SAM, AGED 37



ANXITEA
JAMES, AGED 27

HAMBOINGA
ROBIN, AGED 27



MARZEEPANSY
MATT, AGED 32



*PS4 and "PlayStation" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Also, "PS4" is a trademark of the same company. Amazon, the Amazon logo and Amazon.co.uk are registered trademarks of Amazon EU S.A. or its affiliates.

SILVER
AVAILABLE FROM

zavvi.com **ShopTo**

GOLD
AVAILABLE FROM

amazon.co.uk



OUT NOW

**THIS IS FOR
THE PLAYERS**

PS4

RISE UP OR GET RETRO



PLUS LOADS MORE...



**SAVE 10% USING CODE
'GAMESMASTER10'
AT YELLOWBULLDOG.CO.UK**